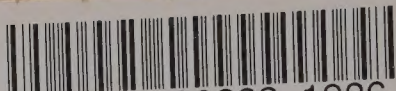


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FRANCESCA ALEXANDER

LONDON : HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS



FRANCESCA AT SIX YEARS OLD

Painted by her father

FRANCESCA ALEXANDER

A "HIDDEN SERVANT"

Amore e cor gentil sono una cosa — Vita Nuova XX. 3

MEMORIES

GARNERED BY ONE WHO LOVED HER DEARLY

CONSTANCE GROSVENOR ALEXANDER

WITH A FOREWORD BY

GEORGE HERBERT PALMER

OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY



CAMBRIDGE
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

1927

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

MY very grateful thanks are due to Francesca's many other friends, American, Italian, and English, who have told me or written me their precious intimate memories of her, that I might intertwine them here with mine. Particularly to Mr. Marion Spielman, for permission to use the illustrations and text of his article on Francesca, in *The Magazine of Art*, published by Cassell, July, 1895; to Mrs. Carteret Fenno, for graciously allowing me to reproduce here (four) illustrations and the English text of the "Sorellaccia" (here for the first time published); and to the Misses Mason, for facts from their manuscript book of Francesca's. I am greatly indebted also to Little, Brown & Company for kindly allowing me to use the lines from Francesca's "Hidden Servants," and to Houghton Mifflin Company for permission to reprint the extract from Miss Peabody's "Book of the Little Past."

From Mr. Spielman's article is taken the first Ruskin letter (page 99), containing his offer for "Roadside Songs." All the other Ruskin letters from which I quote are included in one or another of Francesca's published books, as are also many of her letters to him, rearranged and republished here.

Initials used to indicate where the letters quoted from published books of Francesca's may be found are as follows:

R.S. of T. Roadside Songs of Tuscany.

C.F. in A. Christ's Folk in the Apennines.

H.S. Hidden Servants.

C. G. A.

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FOREWORD

A NEW type of biography has come into being since Boswell's immortal book. It aims primarily at presenting a character not to be imitated, but to be understood. Acts and sayings are recorded because, however strange, they have the tang of individuality. Whatever is done or said we are made to feel proceeds from just this person, and no other. Indeed, it furnishes better material for literature if another person of this particular type never existed. Such a character lives in this book and is presented in essentially the modern way.

The danger of this modern biography is that, seeking after novelty and self-expression, it too readily finds these in the temporary, instinctive, and transient emotions, as if these had enduring worth and were capable of being fashioned into a strange nature. This is an attempt to build a house on sand. Accordingly we find little true biography of this type. It belongs to fiction rather. We more readily imagine lives wayward, passionate, and picturesque than find them so. When we attempt to turn such into existence, we are pretty sure to see them slip down into the cheap and the commonplace. To reach distinction in life persistence is needed, respect for disciplined powers, and adjustment to the world in which we find ourselves. Such high distinction is here shown. Francesca is an instance of it. No one else of our time has been like her, yet she is not "queer." She lives with entire simplicity according to her own hardy, retired, and generous modes. Not a creature of our time, she seems rather to belong three centuries earlier, or perhaps to another world than ours.

Yet in this our world, and united with extreme closeness to a domineering mother, she is contented, joyous even; and when tried by to-day's standards, successful. For something like half a century she had the admiring friendship of most of those whose admiration counts. No writer of that day was more unmeasured in praise, when he inclined to give it, than John Ruskin; few more intoxicating to those who received it. Yet Ruskin was an adoring brother to Francesca for many years while she moved along her quiet path undisturbed.

An intimate acquaintance with so rare a person enriches our own life. I have said that the governing motive of modern portraiture is not moral instruction. Yet how can we come in contact with one built so four-square without thereafter becoming ourselves more stable in the midst of a bustling world? Such a benignant effect will be more natural too because of the simplicity with which Francesca's cousin here records her life. She knows that life at every period of its gentle flow. Ardently she loves both the girl and the woman. That love refreshingly permeates her book, and often makes its pages seem a poetic meditation designed to ease the author's own heart rather than a set piece of writing prepared for a reader. The fact that it differs widely from most books of to-day will lend it distinction and commend it to the little company of those who, oppressed by a garish literature, have kept their taste for homely events, beautiful characters, and a diction showing everywhere acquaintance with those who in former times knew how to use our English speech.

G. H. PALMER

11 QUINCY STREET, CAMBRIDGE

PART I

LIFE AND WORK OF FRANCESCA

CHAPTER I

CHILD OF ANOTHER AGE

THOUGH to Boston people of fifty years ago, she of whom I write here was a familiar household name, and though in England and Italy, as well as in America, there are still so many who remember her vividly, yet there are, of course, many more who never heard of Ruskin's friend "Francesca," never read her exquisite transcriptions of the life and legends of the Tuscan peasantry. Because, as she says in her "Story of Ida," "her life has left a great peacefulness in mine, like the light which remains long after sunset on a summer's day, and while I am yet, as it were, within her influence, I have wished to write down a little of what I [and others of her friends] remember of her, that so beautiful a life and death may not be quite forgotten." Perhaps, too, some who first read of her here may be moved to seek in libraries for her books, and so discover a new and rare delight.

Most natures grow, expand, and change with the changing years. They are a palimpsest, written over and over with a bewildering record of other lives, experiences, beliefs, changes of belief, loves, hates, hopes, fears. But Francesca was such an exception to this rule, preserving to old age essentially the same characteristics she had in youth, that it has seemed best to make the first part of this life of her psychological rather than chronological. Richard Middleton, brilliant, tragic writer of beautiful unearthly tales, said, in his "Story of a Book," that his novelist had discovered of London that "the streets were more than a

mere assemblage of houses." So the biography of any human being is more than a mere assemblage of facts and incidents, however romantic or thrilling these may be. From them all, affected by them as only that one individual soul could be affected, emerges a character distinct from its fellows, rounded, complete.

Francesca was of quite another age and time than the one into which she was accidentally born, as different from her surroundings and contemporaries as a tropical seedling dropped into Northern soil and blossoming there with a strangely alien beauty. American by birth, she found her soul's native air in Italy; born in the nineteenth century, she lived, worked, and thought as a Mediaevalist, with the naïve outlook of a cloistered nun or a child-saint of centuries ago.

How shall one analyze the heart of a child? or disturb with probing finger the limpid purity of a guileless soul? Here are no perplexing counter-currents of impulse, calling for the delicate and penetrating analysis of a psychologist, no warring passions or turbulent emotions, straining at the leash. Like Wordsworth, we can only say of her, "Dear girl, dear child — thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year." Obedience to God's law, literally and simply interpreted, innocent of subtlety, and to mother's will, unquestioned, unanalyzed; tranquil happiness in wayside flowers, summer clouds, and friendly children — with these she filled her gently flowing days. Like a child who peers for a breathless moment from a lighted room into an unlighted street, then quickly draws back and pulls down the curtain, she shut out the noisy world and shut in her own little circle of intimates and interests. No need was there for the little Puritan to enter a con-

vent. Her spotless thoughts hemmed her in as securely as cloister-walls, and she took her walks along prim, box-bordered paths, in this convent-enclosure, screened from secular sights, suggestions, or imaginings. In comparison with her simplicity, most human natures are rabbit-warrens of dark and tortuous turns and windings, mental labyrinths with endless bewildering possibilities.

The legends she found and tenderly chronicled for our help and comfort were far more credible to her and infinitely more appealing than the tales of her own time; and her delicate pen-and-ink drawings, lauded by Ruskin as the loveliest work of the kind since Da Vinci, have little in common with the products of modern studios or "Schools," the figures affecting us rather as does the innocently gay ring of angels and friars dancing hand-in-hand in the left corner of Fra Angelico's "Coronation."

All through the centuries, from time to time has come one who stood apart from the uniform ranks, quietly and literally obeying the old rule of life, to which most of us add liberally our comfortable grain of salt. The best-known and best-loved saint in the calendar is St. Francis, a man whose outrageous differences from the code and the life of his fellows in the thirteenth century made him then accounted by many a madman, yet whose rare sweetness, love, and devout faith drew to him thousands of eager followers. Modern life makes for sophistication, and those whose faith is unquestioning, child-like, are few. Perhaps that is one reason why we turn to Francesca's legends and drawings as to the "Fioretti," for refreshment, or as the thirsty caravan breaks its weary march at a leafy oasis, and drinks gratefully of its crystal spring, before resuming the dusty common way.

CHAPTER II

THE FATHER, AND THE LIFE BEFORE ITALY

FRANCESCA'S father, the portrait-painter Francis Alexander, was dead when I returned to Italy for the first time since my babyhood, but vividly I call before me, from his pictures and what she told me, his face, with the splendid flashing dark eyes and the long white beard. She adored him, and was, all the Italians thought, much more like him in character and in appearance than like her mother. She was delighted to have the baby Cecchino, the Gesù Bambino in her story "The Madonna and the Gipsy," "named after my dear father." She always said she liked Ruskin because he reminded her, in so many ways, of her dead father. She was always with him, and owed to him, not only her artistic gift, but also all her training and guidance in drawing, her passion for art, and delight in her work.

Partly from Francesca's own account and partly from old yellowed letters, together with a brief sketch of himself which Mr. Alexander gave Mr. Dunlap, I learned of the years before they went to Italy and began what was to be their real life.

Francis Alexander was born in Killingly, Connecticut, February 3, 1800. He was of Scotch ancestry, the son of Neil Alexander and Esther Smith Alexander. At eighteen, the lad taught school for a while, but always amused himself by drawing birds and animals from memory, with pen and slate-pencil, to the delight of his schoolmates and his pupils. They called him, he says, "a curious boy," and would bring all their white scraps of paper for

him to decorate with pen and ink. He spent many a noon hour in the schoolhouse, sketching for the little girls, while the other boys played ball in the field. His use of color began quite by accident. He had been fishing on the beautiful lake near his father's house, and noticing the brilliant, glistening colors of the pickerel, perch, and roach he had caught, he suddenly thought he would like to paint them. He hunted up a child's paint-box someone had given him, found an old camel's-hair brush, and "copied nature for the first time." Delighted with the praise of an old fisherman, who insisted he could hardly distinguish between these paintings and the real fish (!), the young man began eagerly to paint flowers and birds.

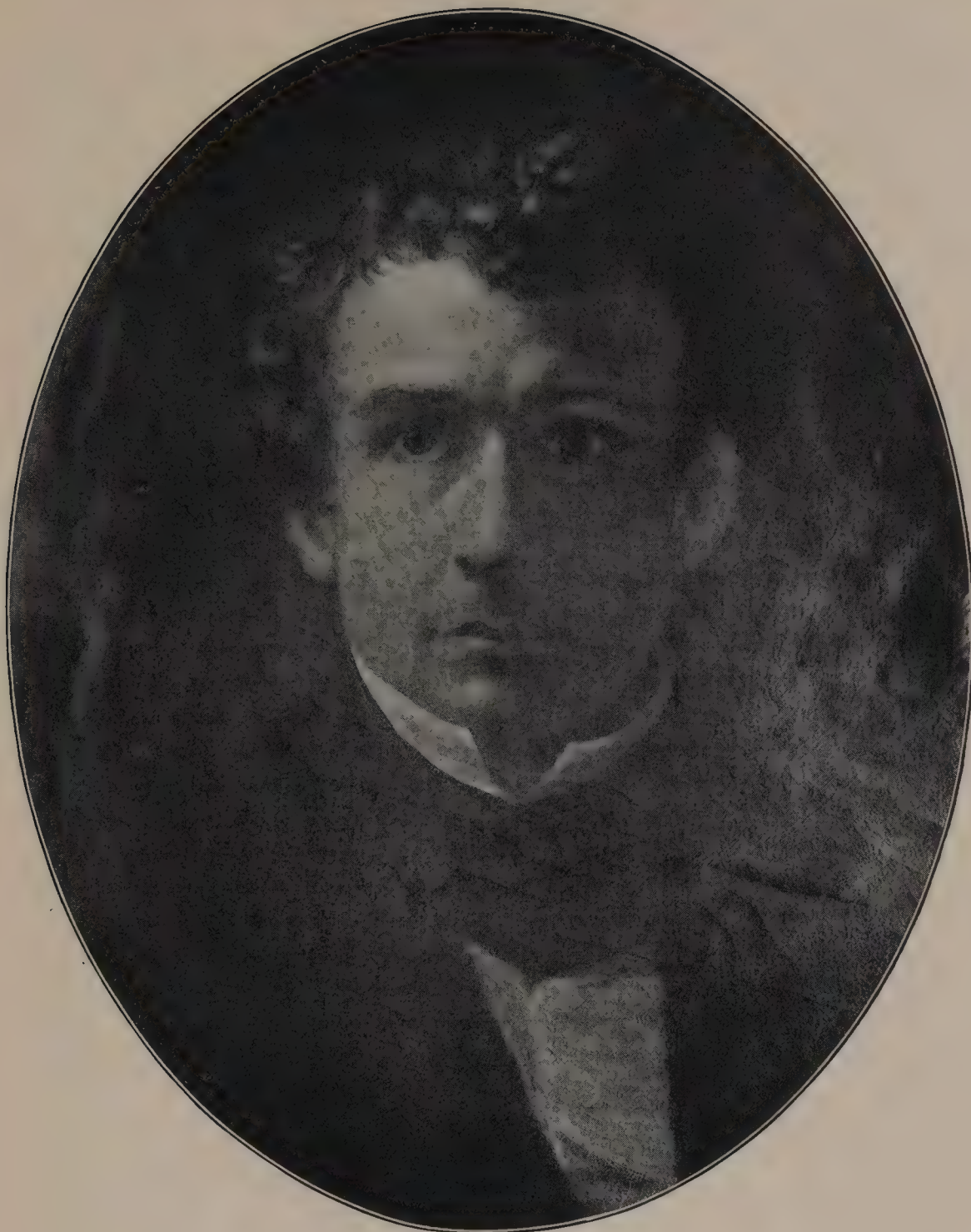
A travelling book-pedler, shabby now, but once graduate from a college, saw his work, heard his dream of really studying painting, and urged New York as the best place to realize his ambition. Though he had very little money and knew no one in New York, and though his family thought his project a wild-goose chase, the youth clung to his plan and started for the great city in 1821.

But he did not go quite unequipped, for a distinguished lawyer, Mr. Prescott Hall, of Pomfret (six miles away), gave him a letter of introduction to his brother, Mr. Charles Hall, of New York. Armed with this, Francis Alexander reached the city, where Mr. Hall took him to many exhibitions of painting and recommended him as a pupil to J. R. Smith. Though Mr. Smith could not take him, Mr. Alexander, through another friend, was introduced to Alexander Robertson, then secretary to the Academy of Fine Arts. "Mr. Robertson," he says, "received me into his school,

gave me a few little things to copy in lead-pencil or India-ink, and finally, at my particular request, let me paint in oils, or, rather, copy two or three first lessons for girls, such as a mountain or a lake, very simple. I wanted to be put forward to something more difficult, but he said no, I could not be allowed to copy heads or figures until I had been with him a number of months."

This time, Mr. Alexander stayed in New York only five or six weeks, but he soon went back for a longer stay. On this second visit, he had free access to the Academy over the schoolroom, and his delight at what he saw fired him with desire to paint portraits. "As I knew nothing of flesh-coloring," he says, "and hardly anything of the tints of landscape or of mixing them, I began to ornament the plaster walls of one of the rooms in my father's house with paintings of animals." Still the desire was strong within him to do portraits, so, locking himself in, he "painted, on the lid of an old chest, the head and shoulders of a man, from fancy, trying to apply the shadows about eyes, nose, and mouth so as to produce the effect of those I had seen in the Academy in New York. As I painted, I began to be pleased with my work and whistled. My aged mother, hearing me, came and knocked at the door and said, 'You are successful, my son, I know by your whistling.' I seldom paint a portrait or anything else nowadays without thinking of the kind voice of my mother on that occasion."

He finished the head and drapery all at one sitting, and then proudly displayed his "portrait," which had, at least, the effect of silencing criticism of his New York expeditions. Next he



FRANK ALEXANDER AT THIRTY

From a self-portrait, owned by the Misses Douglas, of Cambridge

painted two of his nephews, on pieces of board, and so successful were they that he was offered five dollars to paint a full-length portrait of a little girl. Her mother then offered him a dollar a day to paint the rest of the family, an arrangement which brought him thirteen dollars for thirteen days' work!

After these small commissions had given him about sixty dollars, he returned to New York, for definite instruction in portrait-painting. An old man, Mr. McKoy, "gave me Stuart's method of setting the palette, and Colonel Trumbull lent me two heads to copy and treated me with great kindness"; as did Waldo and Jewett, both of whom lent him portraits to copy.

After this visit, he executed various portraits, at eight dollars each, until finally two that he had painted in Thompson "were sent to Providence to be framed. There they attracted the attention of the widow of General James B. Mason. She immediately sent to Killingly for me to come to Providence to paint her family, promising me fifteen dollars a portrait." He stayed at her house five weeks, and during this time, she "took me into her chaise and drove all over Providence, exhibiting my pictures and praising me to her numerous influential friends, and so prepared the public to receive me graciously." Mr. Alexander never forgot this generous friend (who died while he was still in Providence) and felt that he owed to her all his later success.

He stayed in Providence two years or more, painting steadily. Letters dated from there in 1823 show the young painter boarding at the house of the Misses Bowen, and going to parties at the houses of Mr. Ives, Governor Knight, Mr. N. Brown, and Mr. W. Wilkinson. And they also speak casually of his studying

Italian here, with little thought of its use to him later. Like any handsome lad of 23, he is very popular. He writes with enthusiasm of several lovely girls he saw often here, including the Governor's daughter, but though he naïvely confesses once that he "feels sure he could marry beauty and wealth if he liked," he adds that "he prefers other qualities beside, and also wishes to travel first, probably to Italy." Later, writing from Boston, he says: "Miss Francis, authoress of several books, and I write to each other so constantly that there is report about town that we are engaged, but they are mistaken who believe it, though I confess she is worthy of one of the best men in existence." He mentions painting Miss Francis's portrait, in a letter to the poet Percival, adding that she admires the poetry of Percival, and suggesting that the latter acknowledge her praise, writing to her at 42 Chestnut Street, Boston. He was then experimenting in lithography, doing what he calls "my stone drawings."

At the end of two years, he came to Boston, bringing with him a letter of introduction from Colonel Trumbull to Mr. Gilbert Stuart, together with a painting of two sisters, which he took to Mr. Stuart for his opinion. Stuart said, "They are very clever, they remind me of Gainsborough. You lack many things that may be acquired by practice and study, but you have that which cannot be acquired." He invited Mr. Alexander to establish himself in Boston as a portrait-painter, which he did, taking a studio at Columbian Hall. His prices (it is interesting to compare those of earlier and later years) were now forty, fifty, and seventy-five dollars a portrait, according to size.

In 1831, October 23, he carried out his eager desire and sailed

for Italy. He went first to Genoa, then to Florence, where he spent five or six weeks, and renewed his acquaintance with the artist Mr. Thomas Cole. With Cole he went to Rome and roomed with him there three months. Thence they went to Naples, visited Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Paestum, and returned together to Rome. There he painted the portrait of Miss Harriet Douglas of New York. Sir Walter Scott was in Rome at the time, and as he was an acquaintance of Miss Douglas, he "came with her in her carriage to my studio and remained there nearly an hour, conversing all the time in a most familiar manner. I had painted an original Magdalen, which was standing on one side of the studio. Sir Walter moved his chair up to within six feet of it and sat looking at it without speaking. I was all impatience to know what he would say. He turned away with the laconic remark, 'She has been forgiven.'"

Mr. Alexander returned to Florence for some weeks, then went to Venice for seven months. After that, he returned to Rome for three winter months. It was during this period that he mentions in one letter seeing, out driving with her father, lovely Miss Lucia Gray Swett, whose portrait he painted when she was eighteen, a sweet young creature. It is a charming picture, though he was generally said to paint men better than women. Again he returned to Florence, then visited Bologna, Pisa, and Leghorn. He crossed to Paris, where he stayed twenty days, spent ten days in London, and sailed home to New York on the London Packet, arriving August 25.

Reestablished in his old studio in Boston, he charged one hundred dollars for a portrait. Many are the Boston families who

possess at least one portrait by his hand. I remember especially those of Mrs. Jared Sparks (reproduced by the Macmillan Co. as "A Lady of the Republic"), of Dr. Robert Lawrence as a boy of six, and of course of my own grandparents, Edward Eldredge and Hannah Grosvenor, splendidly warm and vital, remarkable for lovely coloring, grace, and portrayal of character. Others of his best are that of Mrs. Fletcher Webster, in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (reproduced in Samuel Isham's "American Painting"); that of Prudence Crandall, painted 1838, now in the Library of Cornell University; that of Charles Dickens, formerly owned by James T. Fields, and now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; that of Daniel Webster, owned by Dartmouth College (on the back of this is the inscription "Painted by Francis Alexander for Dartmouth College, Boston, December, 1835"). In 1852 he painted Longfellow (this portrait is etched by Schroff, in the first volume of the Life of Longfellow, by the Reverend Samuel Longfellow).

In 1833, soon after his return from Italy, he, with Harding, Fisher, and Doughty, opened a joint exhibition of their works in Boston, which was very successful. Mr. Alexander was always represented in the annual New York Academy exhibitions.

Though he painted so constantly during these years, he missed little of importance that went on. In 1825 he writes of attending a great funeral celebration in Faneuil Hall, at which Webster delivered a eulogy two hours long, and John Quincy Adams sat on the platform. That same year, too, on June 17, he was at the laying of the foundation of Bunker Hill Monument. In 1827 he painted H. G. Otis, Jr., then dead, partly from memory. The



MRS. FRANK ALEXANDER AT EIGHTEEN

Painted by her husband before their marriage

winter of 1830 he spent in Washington, painting the president, hearing Webster speak, and so on. The letters sound very long ago. Lithography had just been discovered, everything, freight and passengers alike, travelled by stage from city to country.

Mrs. Aldrich's "Crowding Memories" speaks of him during Dickens's visit to America, painting the novelist's portrait. The secretary of Dickens during his American visit was G. W. Putnam, a pupil of Alexander, and in the *Atlantic* for 1870 he described his precious term of service very fully. In this article, he says:

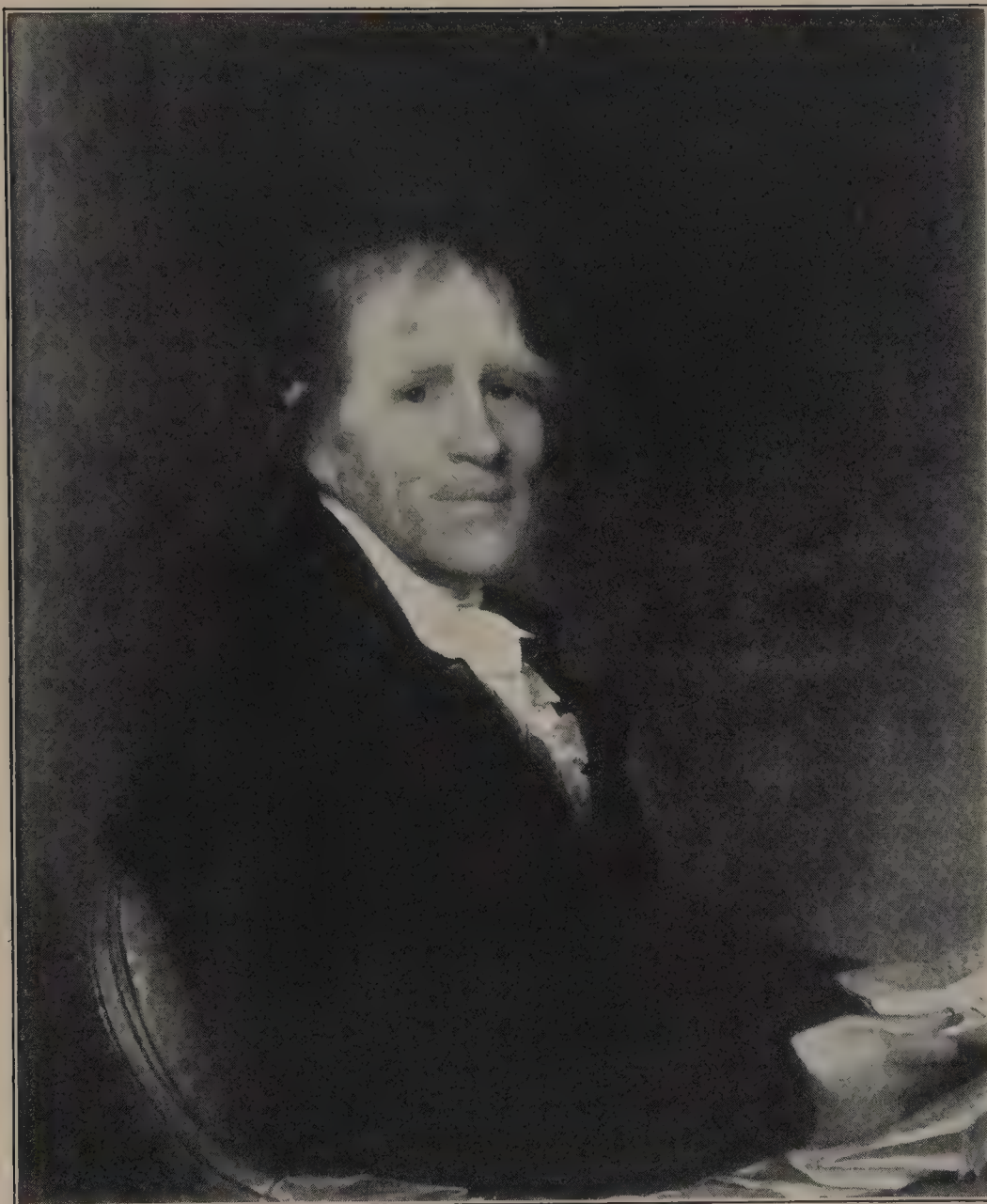
Early in the winter of 1841, it had been announced that Charles Dickens would shortly visit this country and Mr. Alexander wrote to him, inviting him to sit for his picture on his arrival. The next steamer brought a prompt answer from Mr. Dickens, accepting the invitation. . . . Mr. Dickens's steamer arrived Jan. 22, 1842, and the novelist and his wife went directly to the Tremont House. . . . Mr. Dickens had appointed ten o'clock on the Tuesday morning after his arrival for his first sitting to Alexander. The artist's room was at 41 Tremont Row, not far from the Tremont House. The newspapers had announced the fact and long before the appointed hour, a crowd of people were around the hotel and arranged along the sidewalks to see him pass. The doorway and stairs leading to the painter's studio were thronged with ladies and gentlemen, eagerly awaiting his appearance, and, as he passed, they were to the last degree silent and respectful. . . . On arriving at the anteroom, Mr. Dickens found a large number of personal friends of the artist awaiting the honor of an introduction and he passed from group to group in a most kind and pleasant way. . . . The crowd waited till the sitting was over, and saw him back again to the Tremont. This was repeated every morning while he was sitting for the picture.

During this visit of Dickens to Boston, he and his wife were often at the house of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander, and a warm friendship sprang up between the two families. Another friend of the Alexanders and of Mr. Dickens, who saw much of the author at

this time, going with him to New York, was Professor C. C. Felton of Cambridge, whom Dickens called "heartiest of Greek Professors."

But in all these years, the most important incident of Francis Alexander's life, in the light of future events, was his marriage, May 9, 1836, in Park Street Church, to that same lovely Lucia Gray Swett whom he had admired in Rome. She was the daughter of Colonel Samuel Swett, of Boston and Cambridge, writer on maritime affairs, and of Lucia Gray, daughter of William Gray, a Boston merchant. Mrs. Edward Huntington of Norwich, a playmate of Mrs. Alexander's in Boston, in her childhood, said that little Lucia was full of spirits. They used to roll down the granite steps of the Mall together, and had to have a "serious person" in charge of them, to tame their wild glee to decorous limits.

Mrs. Francis Alexander's grandfather, William Gray, lived for years in Salem, where he was "the greatest individual ship-owner in the United States." But when the Embargo was put on shipping by Jefferson, in 1807, injuring his trade, of course, as it did that of so many others, his loyal insistence that the Government had a right to levy such an Embargo roused bitter resentment among his fellow sufferers, and he moved to Boston, with a summer home in Cambridge. Here his little granddaughter was born in 1814. In her childhood, her grandfather's Cambridge estate and what is now Mount Auburn Cemetery (land then owned by Elbridge Gerry) were not divided by any street, but formed one great stretch of pleasant meadows. In these fields the little girl used to play, perhaps climbing into the lofty seat built among the branches of a mighty oak, on the top of "Stone's



WILLIAM GRAY

From the painting by Stuart, in the possession of Roland Gray, Esq.

Mount" there. Mr. Gerry lived in "Elmwood," later Lowell's home, a very old house indeed. Twice he and his neighbor and friend William Gray served for the same term as Governor and Lieutenant-Governor of Massachusetts (before Mr. Gerry became Vice-President).

In those days, Mr. Gray's pleasant house was set far back among the trees, and looked, inside, much the same as now, though the outside has been altered in various ways. (Now it is moved back to Larch Road.) There is still that very long drawing-room which Aunt Lucia remembered, with its two fireplaces; and the room in which she was born is furnished with the same curly maple.

For years, Professor John Chipman Gray and his family occupied the old house every summer, and now it belongs to his daughter, Mrs. Henry Tudor, preserving to the full the long tradition of happy family life and gracious, charming hospitality.

The Alexanders went to live on West Cedar Street, in the house opposite No. 12. They had a summer home on Ocean Street, Lynn, where the young husband built a charming cottage and planted a little grove of trees between his cottage, near King's Beach, and Ocean Street, which was on higher land. A friend of those days writes:

He took infinite pains to water the trees, so exposed to the east wind that everyone predicted his failure to make them grow, but he succeeded, and he had also a delightful garden, with the first imported sweet clover, now spread over the coast. Mrs. Alexander loaded her visitors with sweet peas and other flowers and gave us sweet corn for supper, with wedding cake, the only cake to be bought in Lynn, made by a Quaker named Aaron, who kept the only drug-store.

Another friend, years later, mentions those cherished trees, "now immense, once watered late into the night by the dear enthusiast." Mrs. William R. Lawrence, in letters to Mrs. Alexander after the establishment in Italy, speaks often of Lynn and "Fort Liberty and the other amusements on your pretty place," and in one letter says "What good times our two dear husbands used to have together!" and in still another, "Little Billy promises to rival Mr. Alexander in his love of fishing."

Dr. William Richards Lawrence, the distinguished physician, who had so much to do with the erection of the City Hospital, Boston, was an old friend of the Alexanders, spending the summers at Swampscott, within easy driving distance of Lynn, where the Alexanders spent theirs. He writes once to Mrs. Alexander, then in Italy, "Good old Swampscott of our day is gone forever — I believe you stayed at the Great Annawan, now dignified by the more imposing name of Oaklands."

In another letter he writes: "The photographs were excellent, especially that of Mr. Alexander. His profile was so marked that one could hardly overlook it. Away back among the centuries I remember seeing a Sibyl painted by Mr. Alexander, and supposed to be his wife. The headdress here does not correspond. Where then is that picture? Is it among the 99 boxes stored up for the next generation?" (An allusion to all the boxes in the Bonciani cellar.) "It was too pretty to be lost to the world, therefore we had better rescue it from its hiding place and let it see daylight."

And in still another letter he writes: "Your honored husband is associated with every rock and tree there" (that is, in Swamp-



FRANCESCA AT FOUR YEARS OLD

From a photograph

scott). "The round rock from which he used to fish is called 'Alexander's Rock,' and the name will be attached to it forever."

On February 27, 1837, at the house on West Cedar Street, their only child was born — Esther Frances, now so well known by Ruskin's name for her, Francesca. She was christened at home in a crystal bowl, which was given, many years later, by her mother, to the Scotch Presbyterian Church, on Lungarno Guicciardini 11, Florence, where it is set in a heavy brass frame, fastened to a pillar and used as the baptismal font.

Her father took the greatest interest in her education, along all lines. From the first it was unlike that of any other child, as if her parents had foreknowledge of her coming life and wished to keep her mind free of earthly entanglements, ready, like clear water, to reflect the heavens. A good American servant named Jane Evans taught her knitting — as she says, "a good, pious, excellent woman, a Methodist, of whom I was very fond. She had passed her childhood in the then wild country of Vermont and could tell me no end of stories, about all sorts of wild creatures, from a catamount to a hummingbird. Among other things, she used to tell me stories about dreams."

In Francesca's childhood, the English sparrows had not yet infested Boston Common, and she writes ¹ Ruskin, 1888, of the robins she remembers there, saying "They come to New England in the early spring and their sweet whistle seems to give us the feeling of spring more than any other sound. On Boston Common there are hundreds of them, in the middle of the city, building their nests in the great elm trees, the delight of the city chil-

1. *C. F. in A.*, part VII.

dren. They are gentle creatures, almost as gentle as the doves at Venice. I have known one stand in the long grass and answer when spoken to, as caged birds sometimes do."

Francesca never associated with other children, away from her mother's eye. When naughty (though it is impossible to imagine her ever being anything but good), she was told to stand in the corner, where she remained without turning her sad little head around. She never went to school, but her mother and father were her teachers. Her father taught her Italian on their long walks together in the summer at Lynn; and it became to her later like a second mother-tongue, coming to her lips almost more readily than English. She read only books previously read by her mother, who pinned together pages she considered undesirable for the little girl to read (pins which the docile child never removed).

The little girl was shielded from all knowledge of evil to such an amazing degree that, although we love her innocence, her excessive modesty was really a handicap, in some ways. For instance, she was never allowed to study anatomy. For all she apparently knew, people were born fully clothed and remained so all their lives. In her imagination very literally "the Queen of Spain had no legs." Even when she went to galleries with her mother, she was told, "We are coming to a nude; cast down your eyes," and would meekly obey.

In her old age, when she broke her hip, falling on the slippery floor of the Rezzonico Palace at Bassano, she would not at first see any doctor, and when Dr. Mille did come, she would on no account let him set the bone, unless he could do it when it was covered with a blanket. Mrs. Newman said: "If there had been



FRANCESCA AT SIX YEARS OLD

From a drawing by her father

women doctors then, she would, I think, but there were no such creatures then." So she lay in what must have been agony till the bones healed of themselves. But she was always afterwards very lame.

Up to the last few years, her mother often sent her from the room, when there were visitors, saying, "We are now going to discuss matters not suitable for you to hear." Any dread of evil she had was instinctive, vague, not reasoned, derived, I think, more from the Bluebeards and wolf-grandmothers of the fairy-tales than from real life. So when she was about fifty, Clementina told me, and a man followed her on Via dei Fossi, to restore a pocketbook she had dropped, she hurried from him in terror. Then, when she reached home and discovered her mistake, she said, in trembling relief, "Ma, quel uomo era buono!" (But that man was good!) She never would listen to any talk of sin, or detailed description of bodily anatomy. She just stopped listening.

In describing her own "Ida," she has exactly described herself: "It seems impossible that no bad influence should ever have come near her; but if it did, it passed by without harming her, for there was nothing in her on which it could take hold. Her mind seemed to turn naturally to everything that was good and beautiful, while what was evil made no impression on her, but passed by her as if it had not been."

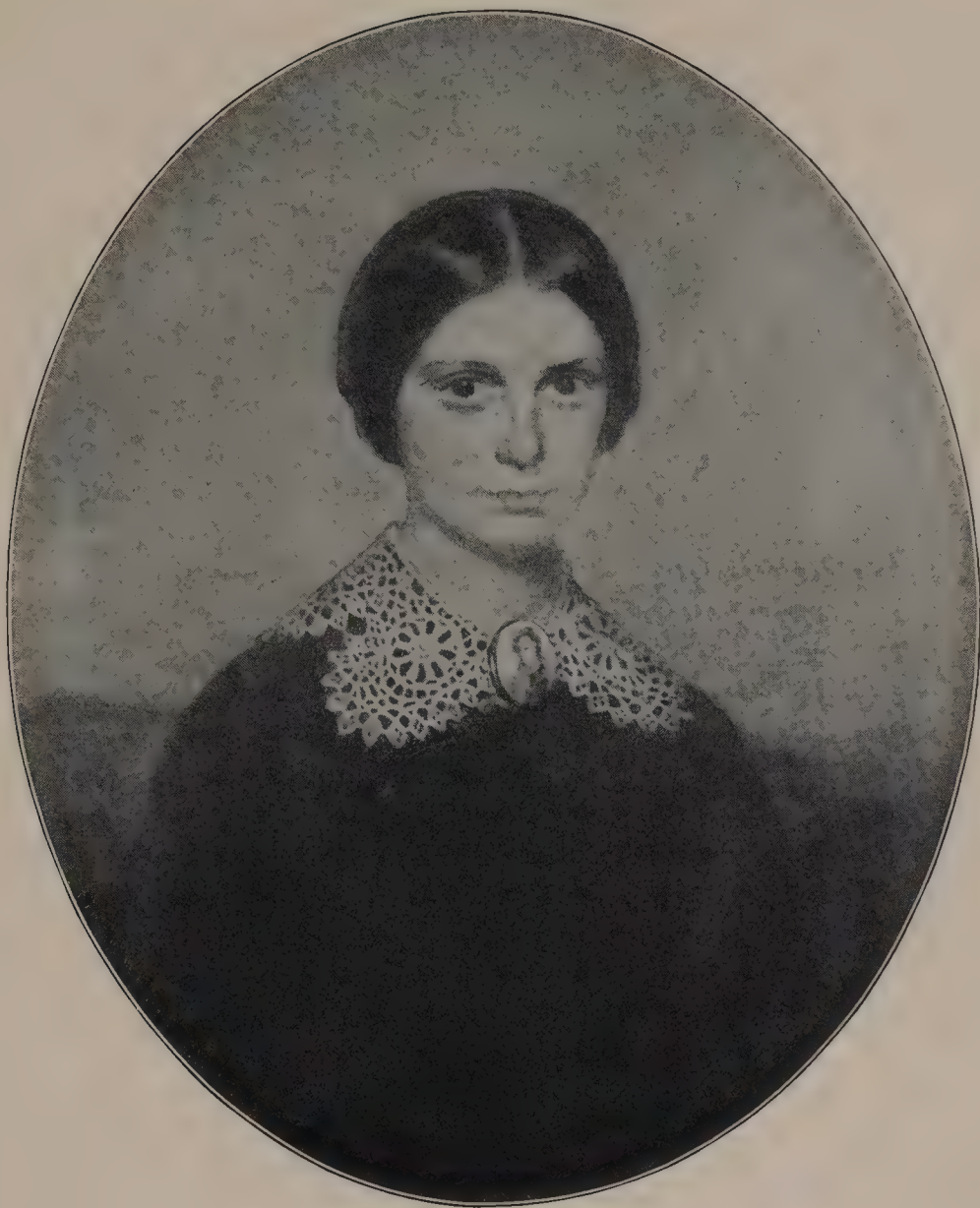
She must have been a beloved little person, so innocent, so obedient, and also so gifted. If the "child is father to the man," surely this child was mother to the woman, for from a tiny girl she possessed all the gifts which were later to prove assets in her lifework.

For instance, there was her talent for story-telling, tales she had heard or tales she composed. As a wee thing, she would gather other children about her, and keep them spellbound with her narratives. One friend of those days writes: "When she was 15, she used to amuse me with reciting poems which she had composed. One ballad which she recited was called 'The Fairy Spectacles.'" Another friend remembers her saying, at about the same age, to some girl friends, "Tell me the saddest story you know." They did and then she in turn recited, with tears running down her face, the saddest she knew — "Babes in the Wood"! I have a book of hers, in manuscript, written and illustrated in 1856, called "Biondina," a very naïve ballad. When Francesca was old, Miss Isabel MacDougall of Florence took Miss Shedlock, the story-teller, to see her, and Miss Shedlock recited to her one of Andersen's fairy tales. Francesca listened as eagerly as a child, eyes fixed on the reciter, absorbed.

Her father gave her the rules for versifying and she versified first some German short poems, translated for her, soon acquiring great facility in verse-making. She loved to do it.

Both her pleasure in childlike tales and her gift of versifying stood her in good stead all her life. Children and simple peasants loved the fairy tales she told them, as she drew them and listened to their own stories. In "Ida," she speaks of "those long happy mornings in my painting room, when she used to become so excited over my fairy stories and ballads." When she drew little "Santa Rosa," she says¹ she amused the child by telling her the story of Stellante Costantina, the Grand Turk's daughter

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 186.



FRANCESCA AT TEN YEARS OLD

From the painting by her father, now in the possession of Dr. Milli, of Florence

("which set Bice crying, but then, it does n't take much to do that"). The original of this picture, reproduced here, was given ¹ to Ruskin's "Child Society of Friends to Living Creatures."

Writing Ruskin of the peasant Pasolina, then a tiny thing, she says: ²

When she came to me, which was often in those days, she was always asking for stories: but as she never cared how often she heard the same ones repeated, it was by no means difficult to entertain her . . . [but] the Madonnina (her sister) like many children, had a fancy for frightful stories, and preferred "Bluebeard" or "Marziale the Assassin" to anything else: these stories would make the fresh color drop out of Pasolina's cheeks in a moment, and her lips tremble in a way which was painful to see.

In "Roadside Songs of Tuscany" she describes ³ the gay times she and the peasant Faustina had, singing and telling stories.

I cannot tell which of us knew the most stories . . . I can only say that neither she nor I ever came to an end, all the time we were together. But my conscience was rather troubled, finding that she believed all my stories, "Cinderella," "Beauty and the Beast," etc. as if they were gospel. One day when I told her a story, I think, out of the Bible, I said to her, "This one is true," and she answered, "I rather think they are all true." I tried to persuade her that some of the fairy stories were, to say the least, improbable; at which she said doubtingly, "I suppose when they print those stories, they put in some little things that are not true: that is probably what is meant by liberty of the press."

In the introduction to "Hidden Servants," she writes: "I was always in request with the children for stories I knew and could tell"; and again, in the same book:

Up my stairway, long and steep,
Now and then the children creep,
Gather round me, where I sit
All day long and dream and knit,

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 189.

2. *R. S. of T.*, p. 97.

3. *Ibid.*, page 235.

Fill my room with happy noise,
 May God bless them, girls and boys!
 Then sweet eyes upon me shine,
 Dimpled hands are laid in mine;
 And I never ask them why
 They have sought to climb so high:
 For 't were useless to inquire:

'T is a story they desire,
 Taken from my ancient store,
 None the worse if heard before

.

Then they all attentive wait,
 While the story I relate,
 And before the half is told,
 I forget that I am old!
 But one age there seems to be
 For those little ones and me.

.

Since the time when life was new
 All my long, long journey through,
 I have story-teller been.
 When a child I did begin
 To my playmates; later on,
 Other children, long since gone,
 Came to listen: and of some
 Still the children's children come.

.

Now my sun is in the west,
 Slowly sinking down to rest,
 Ere it wholly fades from view,
 One thing only I would do;
 From my stories I would choose
 Those 't would grieve me most to lose,
 And would tell them once again
 For the children who remain.

As to her gift of versifying (though to the end, her poems were almost as simple and childlike as at the beginning), she grew wonderfully adept at it and so ready as to spur a great poet to emulation. There's a sonnet of James Russell Lowell's, which he wrote when young, because he had been challenged by her, in a witty note, to write a sonnet before morning. He left her at 11 P.M., and wrote one and posted it in the box in front of her house at 1 P.M. Here it is:

Unconscious as the sunshine, simply sweet,
And generous as that, thou dost not close
Thyself in art, as life were but a rose,
To rumple, bee-like, with luxurious feet:
Thy higher mind therein finds sure retreat
But not from care of common hopes and woes,
Thee, the dark chamber, thee the unfriended knows,
Although no babbling crowds thy praise repeat:
Consummate artist, who life's landscape bleak
Hast brimmed with sun to many a clouded eye,
Touched to a brighter hue the beggar's cheek,
Hung over orphaned lives a gracious sky,
And traced for eyes that else would vainly seek
Fair pictures of an angel drawing nigh.

What a solace was this gift to her in her old age, when her eyes had failed! Then she composed her stories in verse, which she could easily commit to memory, so that she might write them slowly as her eyes let her do, a little at a time. Of that time a friend writes:

I shall never forget the wonderful rapt expression in her face, one afternoon, at dusk, when, at "Mamma's" request, she recited, or rather chanted, for us a religious poem she had recently written. It was about a brigand, and appeared later in "Hidden Servants." She was completely engrossed and her nearly blinded eyes [this was in 1897] had a peculiar faraway and very happy

expression. The verses had "come" to her, line by line, unbidden, as she went about her work. Her mother believed that they were the result of direct inspiration.

Certainly, simple though her poems are, they render with amazing fidelity the spirit of the Italian originals. Often, too, they paint a vivid word-picture, as here:

The air was sweet in the narrow street
Where the swallows toss and glide;¹

or here:

And scents from the garden floated in
And the silent fireflies came
And breathed and vanished and breathed again
With their soft, mysterious flame.²

All she learned, all she composed in this way, she remembered, with a memory as marvellous as those of the ancient minstrels. Once I sat two whole afternoons, listening to her gentle old voice reciting a tale she had put into verse (something like the story of St. Elizabeth of Hungary), never, so far as I know, published.

I blush to recall that I stupidly asked her the coals-to-Newcastle question, if she knew any *stornelli*. Instantly she quoted to me the famous one:

Io degli stornelli n  so tanti,
Ne so per caricare sei bastimenti.
Chi sene sa pi  di me, si faccia avanti;³

and then she sang me one after another. As a girl, she had always won in *stornelli* contests, because of this fine memory.

1. *Hidden Servants*, p. 54.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

3. "I know many stornelli,
Enough to load six ships.
If anyone know more than I, let him come forward."

Her voice, when she was still very young, was considered remarkable, and many are the accounts of her sweet singing then. Mrs. Selden, of Saratoga, one of her girlhood friends, writes:

When she came to my house to tea, she would choose to stand in a corner to sing with more power, and she excelled in all that she sang. She loved "Kathleen Mavourneen," "Banks and Braes of Bonny Doune," and other ballads, and bits from Oratorios, though her teacher (for she *did* have a singing teacher) warned her she should wait and develop her voice more gradually. She loved especially "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and electrified us with her rich notes and power of expression.

This gift of singing also lasted all her life. Whenever her mother asked her to sing, she would go obediently to the piano, making up simple accompaniments, and singing like a little child. One friend, writing from Venice in 1892, says:

Coming home slowly from the Armenian Convent, in the twilight, Miss Alexander sang hymns to us, in a strange, sweet voice. She did n't sing them to us, she sang them to Spirits in Heaven, leaning forward and holding her hands up with a rapt expression in her eyes. After singing "Lead, Kindly Light," she said, "That's a good one for me, I have so many waiting for me there."

My own most vivid recollection of her singing was also when she was very old. It was on one of the Saturdays on which she regularly entertained a little group of aged Italian women. First she read to them, in simple Italian, a chapter from the New Testament. Then they had light refreshment (chocolate and bread from a paper bag!), and after that, she told them a story, generally. On this particular day, her mother said to me, "Ask Fanny to sing you the story, an American negro song, of 'The Little Black Sheep'"; so I did. She consented willingly, first telling the story to the old women in Italian, while they nodded their heads in time

to the rhythm, then, with no self-consciousness, singing it in English verse, in negro dialect, in a curious thin, quavering voice, like an old spinet whose yellowed keys are touched with age. It was a dear tale, of a poor little lamb which was ashamed of its black wool, in the midst of its white companions; but at last, meeting Our Lord, felt His hand on its head and from that day was changed to white more spotless than the rest. The last line, I remember, was, "And that little black sheep was I." I have since found a somewhat similar story in "Christmas in Legend and Story," but her version, I am sure, was her own.

Then there was her greatest talent of all—*drawing*. From her earliest days, she was always drawing or painting. Mrs. Selden writes:

Her father gave her informal instruction in watching shadows and noticing masses of foliage, but she soon convinced him that she could draw, without much instruction. He took her to a political meeting in the then small public hall of Lynn and the next day, Francesca drew the group of men speaking and listening. She never could take lessons from anyone: she always preferred to puzzle things out for herself. She printed her letters to friends for a long time, until after they had gone to Italy. Then she saw an old priest's handwriting and said she could learn to write from him, and with her mother she took lessons of him.

She developed an exquisite handwriting, like the delicate script of old manuscripts. As we study her books now, where the beautiful columns of English and Italian stand side by side, clear, even, lovely as the sprays of wild flowers which separate them, we marvel at their perfection. Mr. Spielman says:

She began to draw almost as soon as she could speak, and she was kept constantly supplied with materials and surrounded by the fine pictures which constituted what Mr. Alexander called his library. He advised her in her work

and followed it with the closest and profoundest interest, more particularly, perhaps, as he found in her a growing ability to produce effects without effort, which all his life he had been vainly striving to obtain. As a child she was always composing stories in rhyme or prose, and illustrating them with drawings that were certainly remarkable for audacity, both of design and execution. She was no more than seven when she announced that she had made up her mind to be an artist and to work for poor children, and although her mother gravely opposed a career fraught with so many disappointments, the child never renounced the idea. She scouted the suggestion of a distinguished expert that she should devote herself to the cultivation of her rare singing voice, not believing that she had any real musical talent, and she declared that the study and imitation of nature alone should claim such ability as she might possess. So far, indeed, did she carry this feeling for nature that she was never willing to visit the theatre lest the sight of feigned emotion should affect her appreciation of the real. She was not more than thirteen years of age when she produced her first oil-picture, "The Babes in the Wood." It is true that the robins were as big as the children; but at least the picture proved that the little artist had a true and delicate eye for colour. Her passion for finish, however, so beautifully evident in her pen-work, she found to be an obstacle practically insuperable in paint: for the amount of time absorbed by pictures painted under such conditions was intolerable to a young and enthusiastic lady. Every part had to be finished like a fine miniature, not because she had any artistic views, but simply because she saw things so — another and this time visual point of contact with Mr. Ruskin. To the end, therefore, she has for the most part given up the nobler medium. . . . She proceeded, therefore, with her drawings, completing them with the utmost finish of execution. It was when Francesca was making such rapid progress that Mr. Alexander was inclined to have her regularly taught; but in view of the satisfactory development of nature's teaching, he yielded to his wife's wishes that the child and her art should be allowed to grow up together in unforced, untrained harmony. Professor Ruskin's remark that the drawings are something by themselves, that he had never seen anything resembling them before or since, is therefore literally correct under the circumstances. They are, as he expresses it, "a singular combination of simplicity and power."

She belongs in truth [Mr. Spielman adds] to the band of artists who were born with the Renaissance and brought it to its glory; a belated draughtswoman devoted to the glorification of religion natural and revealed, who has never known the joys and pains of the training-school, and has had no five

years' experience of drawing from the nude. If she had, her figure draughtsmanship would have been more academically correct and less stiff; but who knows how much she would have lost of the most precious of all her qualities, her power of expression of the subtlest and the deepest kind. . . . Her art is thus as artless as it may rightly be, and we may be thankful for it, as that the airs and graces of a lady of the town are not included in the natural beauties of the saints, gipsies, and contadini.

Apropos of Francesca's training, or lack of training, in drawing, there's an amusing reminiscence of hers in the manuscript-book she made for Mrs. Mason of Boston. In it she says:

A long time ago, when we first came to this country, our landlord employed an old man to repaint some of his rooms, and among them, the one we ourselves occupied. I was much amused at the time in watching the old man, who had magnificent ideas of house-decoration, and who surrounded our room with golden columns, the lights put on with real gilding, and hung them with flowering vines, of imaginary species. I was a very young girl then, and thought probably that old Principe knew a great deal more than he did. At any rate, I wanted to learn perspective, and I engaged the old man to teach me. . . . He used to say he was descended from a royal family and once, by way of a lesson, he gave me his coat-of-arms to draw, a lion holding a crown in his forepaws. . . . He patronized me in a way that much increased my respect for him. . . . "My poor father," he used to say, "spent so much money to have me made an artist and now I have to be even a whitewasher at times!"

CHAPTER III

THE MOTHER

RIGHTLY to comprehend Francesca, one needs some acquaintance with her highly original, domineering, lovable mother.

At my very first visit since childhood, Mrs. Alexander came tripping gaily in, very picturesque, full of vivacity, kissed me on both cheeks, foreign fashion, and then said, looking at me critically, "You look like my husband and like Fanny"; adding regretfully, "And you used to be a pretty baby!" A little later, she asked: "Did you get that gown at Hovey's, my dear?" and proceeded with a catechism, which included, "Who are your friends in Boston?" and "What is your income? I hope a good one."

She was old even then, but all her senses were absolutely alert, and her memory perfect. She often began by talking Italian to me, fluent but very American in accent and idiom. Francesca's was, of course, like a native's, though curiously enough, she kept a Yankee intonation. The Italians say the mother "made many 'spropositi' (or slips), but we liked to hear her talk, she was so amusing." I remember one time when she told me in Italian, with much animation, what she had just been reading — Roosevelt's adventures hunting in South Africa. At last, Francesca came in and said gently, "You know, Mamma, you do not have to talk Italian to Constance." And the mother, much amused, said, "Oh, so I don't!"

Sometimes I saw only Francesca, because "La Mamma" was expecting the doctor or lawyer and was not well enough to see two visitors. Indeed, she often lay on a couch to receive me. But I remember that once, after all the excuses had been made for her by her solicitous daughter, she suddenly came almost dancing into the room, old though she was, her eyes sparkling with roguish mischief, like a child who has been told to take a nap, but has eluded her nurse and come down to surprise her mother.

Those first questions she asked were prompted by her constant interest in everything and everybody at home. She always divided her affection between Italy and America, carrying on a truly amazing correspondence with her old friends and relatives in the home-country. To some she wrote regularly every fortnight, and so kept up with Boston gossip. Of course she wrote constantly to her father until his death in 1866.

Whenever some of these old friends came to Florence, she was full of eagerness to hear all they could tell her, and her comments were lively; as when she said to Mrs. Felton; "There are more distinguished people buried in Cambridge than in Mt. Auburn"; and quoted with relish Max O'Rell's saying: "If I could be born again, I should choose to be an American woman."

She even kept active accounts in some Boston stores, despite those long years of foreign residence. On S. S. Pierce's eightieth anniversary, they wrote an account of their history, including this comment:

Mrs. Francis Alexander, of Florence, Italy, is probably the oldest living customer of this house. She is ninety-six, and from her faraway home, she has

sent a letter, written in the most regular and stately fashion, in which she speaks of this as an honor and expresses her appreciation of the pleasant business relations with this firm, which began in 1834.

Well versed in the wisdom of this world, whose shades of social distinction, wealth, and importance she so well gauged and so deeply valued, she held court at No. 21, and received with grace, dignity, and charm the constant stream of visitors from far and near who were drawn thither by her unique personality or by the strangely different attraction and the arresting work of her quiet daughter. Witty, keen, shrewd, she was a delightful conversationalist, whose very prejudices, intense and often quite illogical as they were, were yet expressed in a way to capture the attention, and amuse, if not convince, her hearers. Mrs. Newman said: "Everybody went to see Mrs. Alexander, she was so witty and clever, leaving Fanny with her widows." I remember the mother's telling me, with glee, of a bargain she once made with a Franciscan monk. He was showing her his most precious possession, a few hairs of St. Francis. These she greatly coveted, especially as she knew how much Francesca would care for them. So she persuaded him to exchange them for an American rocking-chair, of an ordinary pattern, which she had seen by his eyes that he desired. It used to be said that all the gentlemen who came to the house were immediately summoned to talk to her; and very readily they obeyed the summons and well were they repaid for the time spent at her side. Edwige, the faithful servant, once said to Francesca; "I hope, Signorina, you don't mean to compare our Signora with other people. She has more sense when she is asleep than they have when they are awake."

Only once did her gift of speech find expression in a printed book. In 1905, she sent to Little, Brown & Co. her translation of stories and legends of saints, which she had been collecting for years. The book is called "Il Libro d'Oro" (Book of Gold). One review of it which appeared then says:

The manuscript is written in a large, almost absolutely uniform hand, and fills a rather thick square quarto. It might, indeed, have been reproduced in facsimile and yet been as legible as type. No single sign of age was to be found in it. Her book has made its way, not only among Catholics but among free thinkers, and the remarkable conversion of an English Agnostic was attributed to its influence; but she is an Evangelical Protestant. The quality of mind and spirit indicated by these circumstances would be extraordinary in a young woman, but in a nonagenarian they are wonderful.

I remember that, when it was first published, someone said to me, with a twinkle, "Is it a promising work?" She signed it, as always her letters, with an initial like the sign for the English pound — £.

She was, for her small household, truly a "Duchess of Wrexhe." Accustomed to rule wholly the life of her obedient and docile daughter, she tried further to regulate and adjust the affairs of most who came into close contact with her, always, of course, with the most benevolent intentions. Sometimes it was in small ways, as when she said to Lady Samuel, "Your mother must get a bracelet like mine, hung with silver threepenny bits, obliterated on one side, in order that the names of her grand-children may be engraved on them." She had never met the mother, but "was so anxious to share the idea." Or when she overruled the advice of her physician, saying, when he prescribed medicine for a cough; "Oh, no, I never take that; but boil some onions very

fine and I will take those." Great was her triumph when the cough disappeared.

But a curious, and perhaps fatal, instance of her defiance of doctor's orders occurred at the end of her own life, and was possibly the cause of her death. On her last Easter, Prince Chigi of Rome sent her about fifty Easter eggs, colored red. She was much pleased and asked the doctor if she might eat one. He said, "Certainly not! Easter eggs are never fresh. If you want these to be useful, send them over to the convalescent soldiers in the Hospital, for their stomachs can endure anything." She said that was a good idea; but after he had gone he was hastily summoned back, and to his horror found she had eaten five or six of the eggs. Of course they could not digest — she had been on the most delicate diet for a long time. He said that he considered an operation, but it was too late. The servants had merely prayed and read their prayer-books, when they found she was so ill, and Francesca said gently, "Yes, I knew she ought not to do it, but I never contradict Mamma."

On several occasions, Mrs. Alexander tried to readjust my own life. The first time, she had asked me to take home with me to America a packet for a delightful clergyman near Boston, suggesting that I send it to him by mail. Then, suddenly, she had a new thought. "No, my dear, write him a note and ask him to come and get it for himself. I want you to marry him."

"But, my dear aunt," I protested, appalled by this summary plan, "I don't even know him!"

"Oh, that does n't matter," she answered, serenely. "You can make him very happy, and he can make you very comfortable."

The second time, I had been telling Francesca of a little friend of mine who was unhappy with her stepmother, a little girl with a great deal of money but not much love at home. Almost as soon as I reached my lodgings, a messenger arrived with an urgent note from Francesca; "Mamma thinks that the only thing for you to do is to adopt that girl at once."

Yet the mother could be bored with a responsibility put on her by others. Mrs. Henry Newman, wife of the American artist in Florence, told me of an occasion when Ruskin "sent to Mrs. Alexander a little painter. He was a 'ghost,' one of those who painted in backgrounds for Burne-Jones and Rossetti, you know. Well, Mrs. Alexander asked Mr. Newman to take them over. He had them to tea, ordered their Christmas dinner, and so on — harmless little people they were!"

Professor Royce used to say, "To be a little different from others is to be original; to be more different is to be peculiar; and to be still more different is to be indecent." Francesca's mother was very original, and the originality had every chance to develop, as the years went on, and even, occasionally, to become eccentricity; yet it never lost its charm.

No one of us is wholly consistent, and Mrs. Alexander's character had even more than the usual share of contradictory elements. Thus, in spite of her keen judgment on most points, she had certain odd ideas, prejudices, some of which she communicated to her daughter. Neither of them would step into an automobile or use electric lights — only candles and an oil-lamp. They said simply, "Electricity is of the devil. God made the lightning but man has no right to use it for his own purposes."

So, too, though she carried on all the business of the family up to the very end of her life, even making all the arrangements for the publication in America of "Tuscan Songs," when the authoress of the book was over sixty, she had sudden queer, unreasoned suspicions that she was being defrauded. On one such occasion, she had gone with an Italian friend to a fine old Florentine bank. The banker, an old friend of hers, came down personally, as usual, to attend to her wants. She drew five or six hundred lire, in small paper notes of fifty lire each, and drove away. But almost at once, she sent for the Italian friend of the drive and, very angry, spread out before him the paper notes just received, crying, "Look at those!"

He saw nothing odd about them, but she said insistently, "Read what is on them."

He said, "Cinquante lire."

"Yes, but under that," said she.

"Banco di Napoli" (Bank of Naples), he read aloud, much puzzled.

She blazed; "But you know there has not been a kingdom of Naples for centuries! How dared my old friend the banker give me false notes! You must go to him at once and demand an explanation."

In vain her friend protested, saying that if he were rich enough, he would willingly give her other notes in exchange for these; that she might ask anybody and she would find them good. She would not be convinced, but at last wrote a letter to the banker, making her accusation. The poor man, being not only old but also Italian, burst into tears at the idea that his fine old

bank could be so suspected, and gave her other notes, explaining her mistake; but for five or six years she would not go there again.

On another occasion, she stopped on the Ponte Vecchio, where she was attracted, as always, by the jewelry. She looked at some pearls, inquired the price, was horrified, and said, "But those are, of course, imitation. What extortion!" When assured that the pearls were genuine and worth the price, she turned on the jeweller and abused him roundly for daring to deal in such luxuries when so many in Florence were starving.

Especially fond of gold, she desired, once, to obtain another pin like one she had and liked, but said, sadly, "Of course they are not made any more, at least, not in Florence."

"Not in the city of Benvenuto Cellini!" cried the one to whom she had made the remark. "I will get you one at a goldsmith's tomorrow," and he took her pin confidently away. The new pin was exactly like the model, only more shiny, because new. For that one reason, she refused to believe that it was gold, and never wore it.

Side by side, too, with strong will in Francesca's mother dwelt incongruously timid apprehension. For instance, she was extremely terrified by an earthquake in Florence, in 1885, which made her feel, she said, as if the wall were bending down over her bed. Under the stress of this fearful experience, she wrote the following prayer, so amazingly childlike in its explicit designation of those for whom she prays, and in its fervent repetitions:

O Lord, we pray Thee to deliver us from earthquakes, and here and now, without the smallest reserve of any kind, we place ourselves in Thy hands,

with all that we are or have or ever hope to be, souls and bodies, minds and affairs, and all that we hope for or wish for or fear, for this world or the next, life and death, time and eternity. We place it all without hesitation or reserve of any kind in the hands of Thy beloved Son, our Mediator and Advocate and King and Saviour, belonging no more to ourselves but absolutely and entirely Thine, being bought with a price. And we pray Thee to accept us, if it may be Thy holy will, life and death, now and forever, time and eternity. We ask it in His name and for His sake.

And deliver us from every thought that had better not be, and grant us Thy grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and direct our steps in Thy wisdom. And we pray Thee to grant these blessings, if it be Thy will to do so, to all this household and to all our friends, and those who are good to us: and to our two landlords, the one who is at the war, and especially the one who has been so wonderfully kind and good to us, with all his family. Wilt Thou reward them with great peace in their hearts and in their lives both in this world and the next, and deliver them as far as possible from all danger and trouble. Wilt Thou bless our poor gondolier and his sister and poor doctor at Venice and let them want for nothing, and show us what we can do for their happiness and comfort and give us grace to do it, and if it do not displease Thee, let the gondolier get strong enough soon to take his work again, and the doctor be well enough to walk again and enjoy the beautiful spring weather; and bless Signor Nyorchi and his sister and all whom we love or who care for us in this beautiful city, and let no harm come to the city, but protect it as Thou hast done up to this time, and especially the church of San Marco and the seat where we sat there and the door where we went in and out when we were so happy. We ask it for Jesus Christ's sake and in His name, Amen.

Another dread of hers was fire. Once, when she needed a night-light, she asked Raffaello to enclose it, in some way, to shield it from the wind. The old man simply put it into a very white, transparent vase. Suddenly waking, in the night, she was scared by the very white light, and, shaking, cried out for one of the servants. When the girl hastily obeyed the summons, the moonlight on her nightdress added to Mrs. Alexander's panic, and she hoarsely bade her begone. Then she called her back and was

helped trembling to bed. Next day, she said, "Do you know what that light really was? It was a signal of alarm to the soldiers in the barracks, a signal given from some roof near."

Fear of bandits made the last days at their beloved mountain-resort, Abetone, anxious. As protection, Mrs. Alexander imported from Florence a private *carabinière*,¹ to accompany them about — of course a source of the greatest excitement to the natives.

Yet another contradiction in Mrs. Alexander's character was her spirituality and her worldly wisdom. The peasants, whose poverty, sorrows, simple faith, and touching patience were the main concern of Francesca's life, were, I think, her mother's interest in a quite different way. From the noble Lady of the Manor, her humble feudal tenants have ever been recipients of blankets and coals, and also of counsel and firm, albeit kindly, oversight and care. So here, while the daughter loved and ministered to the *contadini*, as to her less fortunate brothers and sisters, the mother listened to their "short and simple annals" as a good queen to subjects in need, and was graciously pleased to relieve their necessities, graciously pleased with their humble, fervent gratitude, but not to the exclusion of other interests. How else account for the fact that, as long as eyes lasted, Francesca labored at her delicate drawing, her touchingly devout legends, that she might earn money to aid her poor friends, whose penury wrung her heart; while her mother (whose knowledge of money was excellent) could write once to an American friend; "As I have several thousands I don't know what to do with, I think I can-

1. Policeman.

not do better than to distribute them among the nephews and nieces of my dear friend Mrs. T." — to each of whom she enclosed five hundred dollars!

Yet, some of her socialistic ideas were as firm and unhesitating as Ruskin's own, and often along the same lines. Francesca writes him: ¹

Your saying, in "Unto this Last," that masters should treat their workmen as they would be willing to have their own children treated if they were in the same place is exactly what I have heard her say, ever since I was a little child, not about workmen (of whom she never had any experience) but servants. She thinks that servants should be paid enough to enable them to lay by provision for their old age, without being dependent on the charity even of their employers and she thinks if people cannot afford to do this, they should keep fewer servants or live in more humble style in other respects.

These ideas were not mere theories with her, either, but she carried them into practice, giving her old servant Edwige's daughter Clementina and her old butler Raffaello each a house large enough to contain a good lodging to let, as well as their own quarters. How agreeable to Ruskin's own tenets were these beliefs! Speaking of Santa Zita, the servant-girl of Lucca, he says: ² "Granting what I believe to be the truth, that in real nature of goodness and act there are many Santa Zitas, why do we take no notice of them — and get no good of them, but only our fires lighted and carpets swept?" And again: ³ "All the flunkey'ism and the servant-gal'ism of modern days is the exact reflection of the same qualities in the masters and mistresses."

Fond and proud though she was of her gifted daughter, Mrs. Alexander ruled her to the end with an absolutism as alien to the

1. *C. F. in A.*, pp. 72, 73.

2. *R. S. of T.*, p. 40.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

parental sway that modern girls know, as the patience of Griselda is undreamed of in a modern wife's philosophy. In Bassano, an Italian close friend of the Alexanders pointed out to me the long, branching marble stairway in Palazzo Rezzonico, saying: "How many times a day do you think Signorina Francesca climbed those stairs, on errands for her mother? Twenty? Ah, I am sure it was double that number, though servants were plenty."

Strange it is that love of mother could grow so masterful, so demanding, that love of daughter could remain so meek, so dutiful, yet never reduced by that life-long submission to a dull, colorless nonentity, but preserving her essential self to the end, as the current of the Gulf Stream pursues its warm way through the cold waters of the Atlantic. Strange, also, that that mother could keep always her intimate touch with the outer world, while the daughter, to the end of her unworldly days, cared only for the inner riches of mind and heart, whether found in "high-born lady or in village-churl."

CHAPTER IV

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

HOWEVER close ties of kinship may be, we find occasionally in a family differences of temperament so marked as to baffle a genealogist. So here, though the mother was, in every experience of Francesca's life, as closely connected as a Siamese twin, and though never were mother and daughter more truly knit together in love, yet never, I think, were mother and daughter more unlike.

Their Italian maid Clementina said to me, "I loved the Signora really better than the Signorina, but how different they were! the Signora imperious, accustomed to being obeyed, the Signorina so gentle and humble!" The most striking difference, I think, was in the very unworldliness of Francesca. She had said once, "I've lived out of the world all my life and my great wish is to keep out of it until the end." And in the introduction to "Hidden Servants," she writes:

From my window I look down
On the busy, bustling town,
But beyond its noise and jar
I can see the hills afar,
Feeling strange and far away,
From the people of today.

She knew instantly, and with no shadow of doubt, that true happiness had nothing to do with riches or beauty or station, but with "the peace of God which passeth understanding."

It was no accident that her name was called by Ruskin "Francesca," for she was very like the "Little Poor Man" of Assisi, and was one in whom, I am sure, he would have delighted. People applied the same epithets to both. Both were humble, measuring themselves with the Master, pitiful, pure in heart, "courteous and serviceable." Both were aflame with the love of mankind. Francesca felt that the Italians could be understood only by love, and it was this same magic key which opened to her all hearts. She said, "I never saw a wicked person. I have seen those who were called wicked, but they were quite good and dear." Obviously her influence was like that of Beatrice, of whom Dante writes: "Whosoever sees her becomes humble. To whomsoever she speaks, he becomes pure of all sin."

She had a very special devotion for St. Francis, saying, "His poetry has given me great comfort at various moments of my life." It was one of his hymns which she had taught to Ida, and which Ida recited at the last:

Amore, Amor Gesù, son giunto a porto,
Amore, Amor Gesù, da mi conforto.¹

Like a Quaker, Francesca's dress was plain, but she gratified her love of color, as St. Francis did, by delight in the varicolored flowers, poppies like little flames, the gorgeous pageant of clouds from a mountain-top, "brother Fire, so gay and fierce and strong." Both loved the climbing road, even when it was stony and steep, the clear brooks with their rush and ripple, the gray-green olives, spiky cypresses, flat stone pines, the vineyards where the graceful vines hold hands, like dancers, between

1. "O loving Jesus, I have come to the gate of death. Give me comfort."

their poles. Beauty of all sorts pleased her. Ruskin says ¹ of her drawing of St. Christopher and the king:

This drawing gives me an especially interesting example of the exultation in lovely detail which is common to all sincere and perfectly gifted religious artists. The established rules of conventional piety dressed angels in flannel and saints in sable: but Angelico blinds us to St. George with the gold of his armour, or loses the Queen of Sheba in the patterns of her brocade. . . . Nor could this book [that is, "Roadside Songs of Tuscany"] have sufficiently represented the simplicity of cheerfulness, which has made Francesca's companionship so precious to the poor, unless this design had shown her sympathy with all that is brightest and minutest in the dress alike of the earth and its inhabitants . . . alike in the gemmed coruscation of the king's crown, the grace of the dancing grass, and the fringed flame of the wayside knapweed.

Like St. Francis, too, Francesca was merry, with a delicate sense of humor. Even in the days when I saw most of her, when so much had already come to sadden her, she kept much of the old quiet fun, which peeps out of her stories and letters, like a shy, whimsical elf, parting the leaves of an oak to flash a smile before he vanishes. Her disposition was naturally gay, though in her, as in the old Miracle plays, humor and reverence were always separated. Spontaneous and natural, her laughter bubbles, sweet as Barrie's, always kindly, even when mixed with shrewdness. Every now and then in her most serious writings there's a twinkle of mirth, as in the "Story of Ida," where the poet-lodger, who had not paid his rent, "walked away majestically with a bundle of manuscript and a pair of old shoes, which seemed to constitute his whole property." Speaking of a little old peasant's rather patronizing way of referring to St. Christopher, she says,² "She was herself of great age, and had, I think, a certain grandmotherly feeling towards him." She writes ³

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 278.

2. *C. F. in A.*, p. 131.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

of a child friend, little Laddie Cook: "He says he's coming back, when he's a man, to buy marble at Carrara and be a sculptor. But he changes professions so often! The last time I saw him, he had made up his mind to be an engine-driver, and the time before that, an admiral!" Again, she says ¹ of someone in a convent, "I could hardly tell whether Annetta, one of the nuns, regarded her Superior as a patron-saint or a pet-child." When she sees her great friend Angelina nursed in sickness by her pretty, excitable South American niece, she comments: ² "I should as soon have thought of being taken care of in illness by a Brazilian humming-bird as by this 'Fiamma di fuoco.'" ³

Of a noble lady in Bassano, she remarks ⁴ drily: "That is, her ancestors were noble, but I'm afraid they used up all the nobility themselves and did n't leave her any"; and then she adds, of a good though humble priest, "I think he had more right to put 'nobile' before his name than she had, if he did make his fortune out of cake and sugarplums."

When a peasant whom she heard of did not recognize the king when he saw him at a big function, she reflects sagely: ⁵ "I rather think the poor man's only idea of a king was gathered from some picture of the adoration of the Wise Men."

Glancing up at the altar of a village-church, she hopes, ⁶ "Saint Marina does n't know how they have put her up on the altar among those dusty artificial flowers, and the priest shows her for francs!"

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 88.

3. Fiery flame.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

4. *C. F. in A.*, pp. 117, 118.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

When she hears that the country-people call the *carabiniéri* (or policemen) *cherubinieri*, she says,¹ "But they do not appear to regard them as cherubim, by any means."

At the market at Casciane, seeing a woman who, after making her purchases, goes into church to her devotion with an enormous cabbage in each hand, she murmurs comfortably,² "I dare say she did not say her prayers any the worse for them."

She writes of another friend, Enrichetta: ³

She is overawed by certain grim old ladies of the aristocratic religious type. Not that she is that sort at all: she is as sweet and simple a creature as ever lived and just admires the over-dressed, stately Christians at a distance, while she goes about in very plain gown, and has friendly gossip with her *contadini* and tends their sick babies and gives cakes and apples to the well ones and feels as if the good Lord would take her to Heaven some day, though she has no doubt that the ladies who go to church all the time in old lace and jewels will go in a long way before her.

Even Ruskin had his share of her roguish teasing. He has objected to directing his letters to her, care of the bank, and she writes in reply: ⁴ "I am sorry you do not like my address, but what can we do about it? It would look very pretty to have the letters directed to a shepherdess or gipsy, but my friends of those denominations do not generally know how to read, so there would be some inconvenience about it."

I wonder if this quiet humor is what made Ruskin say: ⁵ "Edwige" (Francesca's maid) "is not to be classed wholly among simple people, any more than Francesca herself." In the preface to "Christ's Folk," he remarks, himself, that "the written

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 175.

3. *Ibid.*, part VII.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

sketches contain little gleams of satire which never occur in the drawings.”¹

To her mother, Francesca gave devotion “passing the love of women” or men either. Gently, humbly, adoringly, she obeyed, never questioning the wisdom that directed her days and ways. In the copy of “Roadside Songs” which Francesca had especially bound for her mother, the inscription, in her own hand, reads “To the dearest Mammina, These songs and pictures, with which are bound up some of the dearest memories of our lives, is offered by her loving daughter, Francesca Alexander, Florence, Christmas Day, 1885.”

She always called her mother “Mammina” (a name which was, she says, given first by the friend ‘Angelina,’ whom she loved as a sister). The mother always called her “Fanny.” Francesca was so proud of her mother! Like the children of Margaret Ogilvie, always crying, “Was there ever such a woman!” I remember the pride and delight with which she quoted to me the compliment someone at the Post Office made on her mother’s handwriting on a letter Francesca was posting for her. The mother seemed always the younger of the two, probably because of the care with which the daughter lapped her round, hardly letting her breathe for herself. She was well content to have her mother look younger than she. Hardly a letter of hers omits to say “Mama is better, thank the Lord!” I remember her extreme anxiety, in 1907, when Aunt Lucia sprained her left wrist, getting out of a gondola in Venice, when the water was rough and the gondolier careless. She always waited on her mother like a maid.

1. *C. F. in A.*, Preface.

She came into her mother's room, says one letter (1892), lighted her fire with her own hands (the mother had an open fire in her room always, though Francesca had none), arranged her breakfast, and then sat down by her to eat.

Once Francesca waked in the night and remembered that the next day was her mother's birthday and she had nothing to give her, so she wrote this lovely lyric and presented it, with a bunch of flowers:

On the Festa of Santa Lucia

The day has come — a quiet day
Of holy recollection,
And thought of dear ones gone away
To glory and perfection;
But kind young hearts are with us still,
Their love the day has brightened,
And souls with prayer the chamber fill
Whose burdens you have lightened.

What can I give you? Not my love —
For that is mine no longer,
Forever yours, too deep to move
And growing each day stronger.
A rosebud for old memories' sake?
A sprig of mountain heather?
A prayer the best my heart can make,
Thank God we are together!

In answer to one friend's praise of the little poem, Francesca wrote her:

I told the Mammina how much you like these two verses written for her Festa, and she was greatly pleased and told me to send you a copy of them immediately. So here they are. She says she has no wish to hide them away and you may give them to anyone whom you please. It seems to me there is not much poetry about them, but they have the one merit of being in every word

perfectly true. I lay awake the best part of the night before Santa Lucia, trying with my poor worn-out head to put into shape what my heart was full of. I had nothing else to give her, for I had asked people to try to forget her Festa this year. But things kept coming in the day before, fruit and flowers and pretty pieces of work, and I would not be the one left out. So I tied up a bunch of some beautiful heather and the prettiest rosebud I had and in the morning I wrote out these two verses — blind writing and rather blotted — and sent them in to her the first thing. Of all the friends who used to meet here on that day, long ago, only two were now living, one far away and the other one in the country, sick and dying. But the young people have been very kind. She is wonderfully well just now.

About 1914 she writes to Dr. Robert Lawrence of Boston:

Mamma has entered on her new century, but you would find it difficult to believe if you could see her, for she has kept her sight and hearing and all clearness of her mind. She takes an interest in all that goes on and spends her time in bearing other peoples' burdens. She was greatly pleased and touched by your remembering those strawberries she gave you in the old happy days. Often she is homesick for the old life, though she is much loved here and people are very kind to us. But she has good courage and the Lord keeps up her heart. I wish I could help her more! I hope you will pray for us sometimes.

Apropos of the mother's homesickness, in spite of all that long life in Italy (a homesickness her daughter never shared), I remember she asked me if I wanted to live in Italy. When I said yes, she said, very seriously, "Don't, my dear. To the end of your days, you're considered a foreigner here." And in confirmation of this, Mrs. Felton says that when she inquired, in 1893, for the house of the Alexanders, in Piazza Santa Maria Novella, where they had lived over twenty years then, she was told by a neighboring grocer, "The *forestieri*?¹ Over there," pointing to the house.

1. Foreigners.

Francesca used to tell me often and sadly of the changes in the Florence she had loved so long. To be sure, some of the really terrible improvements, proposed by Italians obsessed with love of newness, were stopped in time. Thus, W. J. Stillman writes, in his "Autobiography of a Journalist":

The authorities, in anticipation of the completion of the present splendid façade of the Duomo [finished in 1887], had decided to refresh the entire surface of the flanks, to put them in keeping with the new sculpture of the front, and had actually inaugurated a system of removing with acids, followed by a chisel, all the toned surface of the sculptured parts so that the Duomo should, when the façade was revealed, present the aspect of a bride-cake in the brilliant whiteness of the marble, but without touch remaining of the workmanship of its original architects and sculptors.

Mr. Stillman wrote for the *Cornhill Magazine* "a scathing article . . . which, falling under the attention of the government at Rome, provoked a telegram ordering peremptorily the cessation of all restoration on the church." For this service he "received thanks of the Italian ministry and the formal request to inform it of any other similar operation which should fall under his attention." As a result, he was able to stop a similar atrocious "restoration" on the Donatello pulpit at Prato. Years later, about 1907, I remember hearing of a project, fortunately also nipped in the bud and by another American, too, to substitute glass for the whole left wall of the church of Or San Michele, in order that the Orcagna shrine might be more plainly visible — as Mr. Bernhard Berenson said, "to make it look like an aquarium."

But many changes *were*, of course, made, like the widening of streets where once the houses leaned across to whisper to each

other historic secrets no tourist must hear: the tearing away of the old, dirty, picturesque Ghetto, now replaced by the great, uninterestingly modern, but doubtless more hygienic, Piazza Vittorio Emmanuele, with its arch. Yes, of course it's all more sanitary now, but it is surely less beautiful than it was. Somehow, in all countries, as local customs and dress and houses disappear, life seems more and more to be reduced to a deal level of uniformity; and with old ways vanishes also the old delight in perfection of handiwork, Galsworthy's "quality."

In a letter to Ruskin (1888), Francesca says:¹

I have been doing some work lately a little out of my line — arranging the pieces for a patchwork quilt. I should not speak of it to you excepting for one very curious thing about it, which will probably not be new to you, although it is to me. Among the odds and ends which I have collected for my quilt are a few poor little fragments . . . of last-century brocade, and there is just about twice as much silk in them as in the most beautiful bits of modern silks and velvets which some of my friends have given me; and I have to bear on a great deal harder with the scissors to cut through them, and I wonder what the reason is, for it sets me thinking of what I have often observed, how old dresses last when new ones wear out; and old walls stand when new ones crumble; and old furniture looks better and brighter with age, when the new cracks and comes to pieces: it seems to run into everything.

In this automobile age, speed appears to be the goal — not the place one is speeding to, or the beauty of the scenery through which one rushes, with a bleat of the horn, a racking throb of the cut-out, and a nauseating reek of gasoline. Mrs. Berenson said to me once, when we were looking at a photograph of Gentile da Fabbriano's "Adoration of the Magi": "Since the invention of automobiles, there will be no more charming, naïve episodes in the backgrounds of religious pictures."

1. *C. F. in A.*, part VII.

With the old ways, too, vanishes the old peace. Perhaps it is because the modern world is so often too busy for tranquil friendship, leisurely conversation, the old gossipy letters, enjoyment of beauty, quiet hours, that I turn with such relief to the stories of Francesca, and go back to the places she loved, among a peasantry as yet unspoiled by modern invention or discovery, where the old homely virtues and faith grow unpruned, like the wild roses in the hedges. It is never the scale of life that matters. I have no doubt the goldfish find ample food for a day's speculation in the fall of water in their fountain when the gardener fills his watering-pot of an evening.

Even at the time of my return, Francesca was growing feebler and rarely went out, but she used to tell me where her favorite street-shrines, or pictures, or churches were, some unfamiliar, some as well known as the adorable huddle of the Ponte Vecchio, with its lovely, faded-patchwork exterior; the charming street-shrine on Via Nazionale, called "Tabernacola della Robbia il giovane"; the Orcagna shrine in Or San Michele, especially the marriage of the Virgin carved beneath to the left; and the cloister of the Carmine, Fra Lippi's convent, where my little brother used to go to the School of the German Deaconesses, 41 Via Santa Monaco. Then I would go to her favorite places myself, and later come back and talk to her about them. Indeed, my own thoughts of Florence, after many visits and sojourns there, are often colored by her thoughts as I heard her describe this or that place of her affections. Through what she told me and other friends, or wrote to Ruskin, I feel that I know it by proxy as it has been for seventy-five years or more, and I catch myself al-

most saying "I remember," of things as they were before I was born, or occurrences before I went back to Italy.

There was the funeral of the composer Rossini, for instance, May 2, 1887, which she describes so enthusiastically in one Ruskin letter.¹ The body was brought from Père Lachaise, Paris, and buried at Santa Croce, May 3. The streets through which the procession passed were all strewn with flowers. It must have been glorious to hear, as she did, all the best bands in Italy playing his "Cujus Animam." Not only musicians, but all Florence joined in honoring the dead composer that day of his funeral. She speaks of the great Guilds marching in procession, to grace the occasion, "each with its own banner, including sellers and loaders of charcoal and restaurant-waiters" (just as not only scholars but ditch-diggers and garbage-men in Italy honor their Dante). Her quiet humor smiles through her comment on the charcoal-burners' flag of blue and gold: "I thought it ought to be black," she writes, "with a coat of arms in the middle representing a smoking charcoal-bed."

Another great day of that same year, May 12, 1887, lingering in her memory, was one that Mr. Stillman referred to, when the façade of the Duomo was finished, six hundred years after it was begun, and was unveiled in presence of the king and queen of Italy. After I heard her description, I went again to look at the "Sasso di Dante," imbedded in a house-wall opposite the great cathedral, the stone on which legend says Dante sat, watching the *first* stones put in place. Francesca thought at first she would not go out into all the confusion and crowds; but when her faith-

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 141.

ful Edwige told her that if she did not, she would not be "a true Florentine," she yielded. I think the city, full of the clamor of bells, and with banners and draperies — poor cloths or rich silks and brocades — hanging from every window and balcony, must have looked much as it did in 1922, when it celebrated the Dante six hundredth anniversary. In the churches, brilliant with myriads of candles, everyone gave fervent thanks, for the city's pride was their pride that day.

Francesca wrote of this, too, to Ruskin,¹ adding:

There was much that was touching and solemn, even a little sad: especially so to me the revival of the old times, never dead in Florence, shown by many of the shopkeepers' placing over their doors the banners once belonging to their particular arts. It brought more smiles than tears to see the grand old banner of the wool trade hanging over a pile of blankets and coarse flannel at a shop down Borgo San Lorenzo.

Several times she saw the terrible cholera scourge sweep Florence or Venice, but she seems never to have feared it, only to have exulted in the heroic charity of her friends towards the stricken. I remember that she wrote Ruskin² of one friend of hers who threw into the cholera-cart (which went about the city, collecting for the sufferers) "her fine household linen and her husband's and her own clothes" — and then of two tiny children who threw in all they had, a wee bank with four francs in copper — the "widow's mite."

She admired King Umberto's behavior, in those crises, as we see by a letter to Ruskin:³

It's rather hard to keep one's patience with the doings of the Municipality just now, pulling down old houses before new ones are built, and mak-

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 145.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

ing everybody generally uncomfortable. I have to think very often about that text that forbids our speaking evil of the rulers of our people; only I should like to know who they are: there never seems to be exactly anybody responsible. I am sure I like the king and queen [that is, Margherita], everybody does, but it is hardly fair to call them rulers, when they cannot have so much their own way as other people; sometimes the king will insist on having his a little, about his own affairs: he did last year, when the cholera was about [that is, 1886] and everybody tried to make him stay out of danger. I saw a lady, a little while ago, married to a Piedmontese, who was at Busca, just when the cholera was worst, last summer, when the king went there, and she gave me an interesting account of it all. She said everyone was in a panic and afraid to go near the sick people; but the king took hold as if he had been a hospital nurse, going always where the danger was greatest, sitting by the beds of the sick, administering their medicines, rubbing them with spirit when the chill came, giving food, advice, or money as they were wanted, sometimes sympathizing, sometimes laughing and jesting to keep up their hearts, until others came forward to help, just for shame; and in the evening, when he went to rest, tired out, and his servants came about him, to change his clothes and fumigate him, he used to smile at their anxieties and then raise his eyes to Heaven, as if to say, "There is where my safety comes from." Of course, all this did not suit everyone, and there was some talk of passing a law, to prevent sovereigns from risking their lives; but Umberto said if they did, he should be the first to break it, and as everyone knew that he would keep his word, there was no more said about it.

She had greatly admired Victor Emmanuel and his patriotic devotion to Italy, believing that he really sacrificed his life for his country. She thought Victor Emmanuel III much more like his grandfather than his father.

Another event which interested her mightily was the splendid Jubilee in 1885 of "the saintly Bishop of Verona, Cardinal Canossa," in which her friend the Patriarch of Venice took part. She cared for it especially because she knew the tragic love-story of the Bishop's youth, when the girl he loved was married by mistake to his old father. Immediately after, he entered the Church,

where he led a very holy life and rose, at last, to be a cardinal. But the lot of the luckless victim of the mistake was surely not so happy as that of her fellow citizen, Juliet, whose woes we lament.

Of the contradictions of which her mother's character was so full, Francesca's seemed singularly free. Her life was a fair manuscript on which one gentle tale was inscribed, one mood sustained, from the first page to the last. Violent emotions there were none, but love and service filled the tranquil days, pity and gentleness informed the childlike heart, beauty delighted and comforted but never intoxicated or fevered the senses. As a limpid stream flows between flowery banks so quietly that one can hardly mark its progress, so this pure spirit followed its course unhurried to the Great Sea, leaving refreshment and fragrance where it had passed.

Of course this stream flowed in a narrow channel. Its limitations are obvious, its innocence of many of the basic experiences of life, the great transmuting passions, the agonies, the ecstasies, is patent to all. But for the especial work she seemed born to do, her very limitations were assets. Unobstructed by the ordinary selfish desires, ambitions, preoccupations, she was assuredly "a rift through which a meaning gleams."

CHAPTER V

EXODUS TO THE PROMISED LAND

BELLOSGUARDO

IT WAS when Fanny was about fifteen that they first went abroad, largely, as I have said, to train her voice and to develop her drawing, going first to Paris. But Francesca seems to have belonged to Italy, as Lafcadio Hearn did to Japan. Very soon they journeyed on to Florence, staying first at the Dragoni Pension, Via Tornabuoni (which is no longer there). Some months later, they returned to America; but Fanny's chest was weak and, after a rather serious break-down, they went back to Italy. It was in her convalescence that her father painted her portrait, in the white sunbonnet and brown dress. She was sixteen then and was, they say, very pink and white, fair-haired, and almost pretty. Several times they tried going back to the home-country for stays of various lengths, always returning to Boston. Once they spent a winter on Bowdoin Street, when Fanny was twenty-one. Of this later visit, Mrs. Selden writes:

She was unhappy. She missed the blue skies and brilliant colors of Italy and the picturesque trees, so flagrantly wanting in the shoe-town of Lynn as it then was laid out, with a long narrow park planted with young trees. She thanked me for taking her to a side street where bright flowers bloomed in little front yards. One day she went to see a lady who had long suffered from an Italian disease, with difficulty recognized by the Boston physicians as "Thorns of the Madonna." Fanny sang to her Scotch songs, Italian stornelli and bits from Oratorios. She visited her two or three times, and the rich, consecrated voice comforted and strengthened her. She began to improve from that time, and at last, left her sickroom and became an important member of



FRANCESCA AT FIFTEEN

From the painting by her father

her daughter's family, a bright happy source of strength to them all. Fanny gave this gift of healing unconsciously. It came from her simple faith. She hoped to do people good and she did.

Whichever country they were in, they kept their interest in the other. On a visit to America in 1869, Mrs. Alexander consulted Dr. Williams, a famous eye-specialist, for the Duc di Lecci, living near Naples, who had been arrested in the Risorgimento and kept in prison twelve years, chained with ball and chain to the next man. As a result of this imprisonment, he was ill and nearly blind. The suggestion of the oculist for this man did him so much good that the Duc di Lecci, in gratitude, gave Mrs. Alexander a pair of marvellous Etruscan vases.

The father and mother did n't want to live always in Italy, but Francesca was homesick when she left it, and out of her element in her native land, so at last, for her happiness, they consented to make their permanent home in the land of her adoption.

On their first return to Italy, they went to Bellosguardo, where they stayed many years, their only absences being for the American visits interspersed. They were very happy in this beautiful place, where Mrs. Browning says,

We found it hard
Gazing upon the earth and heaven, to make
A choice of beauty.

The father taught Francesca as they walked up and down the long corridor. The mother always said that it was because Francesca, child-like, tried to avoid stepping on the cracks, that she acquired the peculiar lurching gait always afterwards hers. The little girl's education was a very real one, for we know from her

own lips that she knew the "Divine Comedy" and the Bible almost by heart, and was always reading "old and curious books" — rich pasturage for the little lamb to feed on.

There is a little terrazza on the second floor where, when Garibaldi stayed a while next door, at Madam Mario's, about 1866, they used to come out to wave to him, as he rode by on his white horse, and he would wave his hat in return. She writes Mrs. Mason that during his stay the road was crowded all day with Garibaldians. The Alexanders made many things for him, and used to show with pride a cup of his and many letters. In those days, too, they did much for a Garibaldian from near Naples, Count Castra-Manente. Later, he said to Francesca, with fervent gratitude, "What can I do for you in return?" She answered, "Send me a rose from your garden." He sent the rose, and with it, some lovely Greek pottery, saying, "The rose will fade but these will last."

The little Quaker never went to parties, and only once does Clementina (the maid who was often with them there, especially after her mother Edwige became part of the household) remember seeing her in a blue silk dress. When she went out, she wore a big white straw hat, contadina-fashion.

They had many friends there, English and American, as well as Italian. Fanny knew well Boott, the musician, and the sculptor Duveneck, and was troubled, I remember, on hearing, later, that motherless Lizzie Boott (later Mrs. Duveneck) had so few girl companions. I asked her eagerly if the future Mrs. Duveneck was really as lovely as the beautiful effigy of her, by her husband, at Trespignano, and was comforted to hear that it is very like

her. Another friend at Bellosguardo, who really came there to be near his great friend, Mr. Alexander, was Mr. Thomas Ball, the sculptor, whose studio was just outside the Porta Romana.

Fanny and her father, the best of comrades, were constantly together. Under his guidance she drew every day in the cloisters and churches. She was brought up from childhood in a constant atmosphere of art, the truest education. They walked everywhere together, up and down to Florence and the country about, though her mother preferred to drive.

The father must have been a picturesque figure, from all accounts, very independent in both dress and behavior, so that endless anecdotes are told of him. Clementina says he wore a tall silk hat and carried his paper money in it. Once he had been to market to buy fruit, as he always did himself. On the way home, he lifted his hat to a friend and the wind blew away a 50-lire piece. A shabby man, just behind, caught it and brought it back; but Mr. Alexander, suspecting a beggar, said (without looking at him), "I've nothing for you, my man," and so lost his bill.

He always wore a blue and green shawl over his shoulders except once when, on a very cold day, he took it off to wrap around Clementina's little sister, who looked cold. Generally, as he climbed up the hill, after a long walk, and reached the Piazza San Francesco, he would sit down on a marble milestone that used to be there and eat the fruit he had bought near Porta Romana; and Edwige's children regularly came out of their house to share this *al fresco* feast, as well as gifts of vegetables, and sweets. But on one such occasion he had nothing with him, and, seeing a group of other children looking hungrily at the

heaped fruit on a street barrow, turned imperiously to the fruit-man and said, "Give those children some of those peaches."

"But," protested the man, "I can't afford to. I make my living by selling it."

"Oh, as to that," cried Mr. Alexander impatiently, "I'll pay."

Shrugging his shoulders at the eccentric foreigner, the man answered, "Signor, if you pay, they may have the whole barrowful."

Some of the first portraits Francesca made were of little Clementina here. She used to climb up to a meadow above their villa and draw the child under an apple-tree there.

Here, too, her lifelong charities really began. One Sunday, she attended the little Franciscan church of Bellosguardo and was struck with an old man's simple prayer that "God should help the poor because there were so many of them." Mr. Spielman tells this story, and goes on:

A little later, as Christmas-time came round, a charitable American lady desired, in pursuance of her practice at that season, to bestow alms among the deserving poor; but being a stranger in Florence, she was forced to seek for trustworthy indications. These were quickly forthcoming, and to Francesca, to her boundless satisfaction, was entrusted a bagful of francesconi, for distribution among the poor of the church. She forthwith made a little book of some score of sheets of note-paper (the manuscript book already referred to), in which she gave a short account of the pensioners, one by one, with a little drawing illustrating the sad story of each; and the American lady carried it away with her, well satisfied with the prize that had rewarded her charity, which she thereupon redoubled. [This book is now in possession of the Misses Ellen and Ida Mason of Boston.] Arrived in Paris, the lady showed it to other American friends, who, pleased at the story, sent a large sum to the charity-loving child; and this charity-loving child could do no less than make

a book for them, and so much did she enjoy her work and the use she put it to, that she always liked to be similarly employed. It was thus that she often illustrated the translation of some *Rispetto* . . . for translation cost her no effort, and many of those in the "Roadside Songs" she wrote down straight off, keeping no copy of them. Next she made a book of fifty or sixty large pages, a story in verse, to please an invalid child, with a drawing on each page. The execution left a good deal to be desired, for she was still very young, but some of the designs and verses could hardly have been better. A little later she drew nine charming drawings illustrating Hans Andersen's *Little Gretchen*, which she found in a newspaper in the form of a ballad.

She never had much idea of money, except as means for helping the unfortunate. Once she had only four lire left, after settling the household accounts. Told by her mother to buy shoes before leaving for the summer, she went obediently to Via Tornabuoni, tried some on, and then said, "I have only four lire to pay" (in those days, about eighty cents). Of course she did n't get them, but said nothing, and would have started with shoes all broken if her mother had not noticed them, inquired, and sent her off to town again, sharply, with money to buy what she needed.

Money, she thought, was ours only to give away. She even went further than this, as on the occasion when she came to Clementina in distress and said, "How shall I pay my debts?" After a little puzzled questioning, the servant discovered that she meant her charities.

Francesca and her father preferred to give one lira each to ten persons, saying, "Then, at least, they will have bread to eat"; but the mother liked to give ten lire to one person. Clementina gave me a funny little bag, knitted or netted, from coarse thread, and said that Mrs. Alexander used to give her one lira apiece for bags like this, using them to hold the lire she gave away.

From the first, nothing gave Francesca such joy as to relieve distress. In "Christ's Folk in the Apennines,"¹ she said, when she gave the poor girl Lilla the twenty-five francs for her rent, "I don't believe there was a lighter heart in Florence that day than Lilla's, unless it was mine, when she went away with the money in her pocket." She and her father first, and later, she and her mother, used to go from Bellosguardo to Monticello, outside Porta San Frediano, to a little court (which is no longer there), two or three times a week, to a group of the very poor, to read them the Testament, give them money, and comfort. She speaks in letters of many of these, already living in one room with their whole families, taking in two or three acquaintances more destitute than themselves.

Of course she soon came to know and love the Italians all about that lovely hill top. There was blue-eyed Lilla, the pretty barefoot baby at a farm there, with whom she used to walk and pick flowers; lame Assuntina "whose family lived on the second floor and a great white ox on the lower story"; Annina Bini "a beautiful woman and sweet singer of S. Vito a Bellosguardo," who taught her several songs; the model for St. Joseph in the "Madonna and the Gipsy," a contadino who hired a farm there for a year or two; and all the children who came to hear her stories. Clementina told me that when she was only fifteen (the first year in Italy), she used to tell them a tale she made up, called "La Pastorella," of a shepherdess whose one lamb was threatened by a wolf. A splendid cavalier, whose glance had rested approvingly on the pretty shepherdess, saw the danger, rushed back, and killed the wolf.

1. Page 70.

"I am poor," said the grateful shepherdess, "but you shall have woollen stockings made from my lamb's wool."

"I want only a kiss, my lovely one," answered the enamoured cavalier.

"And so," ended the artless tale, "they were betrothed and married."

Francesca writes Mrs. Mason, December 30, 1865, of the Christmas tree she had for the country children every year, adding, "I used to give them toys, but they did not seem to care very much about those. They were mostly very poor, and I found that even the very little children were better pleased with a pair of stockings or a woollen handkerchief [that is, to wear over their heads], than with a doll or a set of tea-things, so now I have a tree more to their taste." The letter goes on to tell in detail of what she had done with the money her friends gave, to relieve the poverty of "that anxious hen," Jerasina's mother, and her big brood of needy chicks. Letter after letter, as well as one entire manuscript book, made for Mrs. Mason, is filled with accounts of poor contadini whose anxieties and sorrows grieve her tender heart, and whose distresses she yearns to relieve. Every penny that comes in from her drawings is expended on her dear poor. Once she writes; "Papa was so ill and I was kept so busy that I could not, as usual, earn anything for them." Again, in 1865, writing her thanks anew to the Masons, she says:

For myself, I have had great happiness in the distribution of this money, without which I should have had no means of relieving much misery which I could not help seeing. Perhaps some could have given more wisely, but I do not think a soldo was wasted. I can never be sufficiently thankful that the help came this past year, which has been a year of particular troubles on ac-

count of the war in America, which has taken away much work from this country, of the conscription, and of the unusual amount of illness among the poor; so that we never needed help so much before, and I hope, never may again.

In Bellosguardo she knew an old soldier of the first Napoleon, who had "nothing military about him except his St. Helena medal, which he wears on Sunday, and his knowledge of the French language, in which he usually addresses his uncle." And another acquaintance here was a poor man who stood outside Porta Romana, with a little stand from which he sold roast chestnuts in winter and watermelons in summer.

In 1866 there was a terrible, devastating flood of the Arno, distressing to her, since it brought misery to so many of her humble friends. Several references to it occur in letters to Mrs. Mason, written at the time. For instance, she tells of a basket-maker,

whose store is on a street near the river. He laid in, not long before, a considerable stock of willows for his baskets. Soon after, the flood came, the river rose in the night, higher than it had ever done before, and of course, no one was prepared. The street was a violent torrent, the water rose a metre in the store, many things were ruined, many more were damaged by the black mud the water washed in.

Another poor soul lived on low ground near the river, just outside Porta San Frediano. They had just laid in the *bracce* for their fuel for all winter. The lower part of the door had been walled up when the water began to rise, but the force of the river swept away the bricks and nearly filled their room, which was on the groundfloor, and everything was either broken to pieces or washed away.

Still another family affected by the disaster lived in the Casentino. Gasparro

had a small farm worth about \$4000. They supposed themselves safe from the flood, as the government had built a wall to prevent the river from overflow-

ing. It cost a million francs but the flood swept it away as if it had been a sheet of paper. This farm was on a hillside. When the water subsided, the farm was gone. The earth was all washed away, nothing remained but bare rocks. They were entirely ruined in one night.

Once she writes joyously of the cure of a poor girl, due to a simple remedy suggested by Mr. Alexander. The girl had malarial fever, and the doctors, after a drastic course of treatment, said she was doomed and advised sending at once for the priest.

Fanny writes she remembered she had heard her father say that he had known sweet cider bring out the eruption in cases of measles and she recommended that they try new wine. She sent them a bowl of the soup that was just ready for dinner and Mr. Alexander added a little new wine that had been sent him from the Casentino, as it seemed, by chance. The girl liked the wine very much and drank it often in the night, and in the morning, the eruption came out and the immediate danger was over.

I must say, some common-sense health suggestions seem often to have been needed, for the innocent comments in Francesca's letters do not give one a very profound respect for the Italian medical men she came in contact with! I remember one letter in which, writing to Mrs. Mason from Abetone, she says:

Sandra once sent me a note, saying she was ill. A doctor staying there, though he would not go so far, *guessed* it was inflammatory rheumatism, and sent her a receipt for some medicine which would cure her if she had it and would do her no harm if she had not. There were two applications, one external and one internal, and I had to write a note to explain this, lest she make a fatal mistake!

For these and many more she worked unceasingly at her drawing, using for them all the money she earned in this way. As she writes, in the book of which I am speaking,

And the best love man can offer
To the God of love, be sure,
Is kindness to His little ones,
And bounty to His poor.

Sometimes the needs of those she helps are suggested to her by her pastor, then Mr. Magrim, at the little Lutheran church in Florence, to which she went faithfully all her life. Thus she speaks of helping "a blind tailor whom the church employs to sell Bibles about the street and sometimes pays a small sum to go down to the Maremma and sell Bibles to the laborers who go there for the winter"; and others who had been persecuted for their religion, lost their jobs; one even who had been imprisoned on a false charge. She helps send scrofulous children to the Marine baths, Ospizi Marini, at Viareggio, redeems pawned clothes or tools, pays rent, buys a blanket or mattress, gets a dress or shoes, buys a garment or two for a new-born baby or a bride, or the last dress for the dead, purchases meat for broth or bread for the starving (each expenditure scrupulously itemized, down to the centesimi). As I read the little personal histories, with which Mrs. Mason's book is filled, I marvelled at the number of lives known and helped by this shy girl, Good Samaritan to so many fallen by the wayside.

The whole region is familiar to her. She describes, in one letter, "an old church, which belonged to the Misericordia and is dedicated to S. Francesco. It is always closed except when Mass is said there once a year. I often go there to see a beautiful statue of a bishop, by Lucca della Robbia, and so of course, I know the custode" — another pensioner, by the way. And, in the manuscript book, she speaks of a tower "on the side of the hill below our house, one of the few pieces of antiquity which survived the siege of Florence in the fifteenth century, when pretty nearly everything at Bellosguardo was destroyed. It is now used for a

farmhouse and inhabited by a man called Vito Berti and his wife."

She used to love to hear the peasants singing at their work. Once she writes: ¹ "It used to be very pretty to hear the contadini there, in the time of harvest or the olive-gathering, singing and answering each other with stornelli tunes from tree to tree or from field to field, nearly all pretty, but the prettiest the one with the chorus, "O Biondina, come la va."

Here perhaps first was shown another of her strongest emotions, her love of flowers. Clementina says that, as a child of fifteen or sixteen, she put leaves of lettuce on the chairs, to make a party for her mother, because, she said, the green was so pretty. And so it is! I often wonder why nobody expresses admiration for the exquisitely shaded violet heads of cabbage, or puts into vases sprays of celery-tops. Think of the beauty of sharply-fluted artichoke leaves, like the classic acanthus of the column capitals! She would always drop her purse carelessly anywhere, to run over to the man when he was arranging flowers and beg him to be careful. Edwige said that in the hill-side meadows she leaned so close to the wild flowers that she "smelt them with her ears." Poor Edwige did not always share her mistress's enthusiasm. Francesca writes Ruskin once: ² "When Edwige first came to be with us in Bellosguardo, I had a fine bed of mignonette just coming into blossom. One morning, I went into the kitchen and found Edwige cutting every stalk of it into shreds for the soup. She had cut it all down, mistaking it for spinach."

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 121.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

Her father was nearly as devoted to flowers as she. Writing to Ruskin of his "Præterita," she says: ¹

Also your studies of the growing grass and leaves which my own dear father so loved and taught me to love. I have never known anyone, except you and him, who looked at plants just in that way: he had never studied them scientifically, but was never tired of finding out new beauties and wonders in them, and regarded even the most common with deep reverence, saying that they showed so plainly the work of the Almighty Hand. I remember, when I was a small child, his explaining to me the meaning and beautiful arrangement of the leaves, blossoms, stalk, and root of a clover plant, with as reverential feeling and manner as another would have explained a chapter of the Bible. And strangely enough, he saw many other things as you see them, especially pictures. He was a great believer in Carpaccio, per esempio, before you had ever taught people to care for him.

She often speaks of her father's religious faith. In "Roadside Songs" she says that, ² when Edwige remarked that ladies and gentlemen seemed to think there was no need for them to be good, since they were rich, Francesca told her "my own father had never done such things," to which she replied, "But he was good just as if he had been poor." Another time, two tiny children, half-sisters of Edwige, came to see her, wretchedly poor, and were so grateful for her kindness that they promised to pray for her that night before they went to bed. She "asked them to pray for the recovery of my father," who was ill at the time; and one answered very earnestly, "I will pray that he may live longer than I." I told her that she must not pray for that, because my father was an old man and it would be the same as praying to die before her time, and then she said, "At least I will pray that he may live quite as long as I do." But when Francesca, through

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 180.

2. Page 220.

Edwige, gave the poor child warm clothes and shoes and stockings, the little girl, after trying in vain to express her thanks to her own satisfaction, finally said, "Now I will pray the Lord to make the Signorina's father live longer than I shall, and I do not care if it does make me die a little sooner."

CHAPTER VI

21 PIAZZA SANTA MARIA NOVELLA

BUT at last, owing to religious persecution which they suffered from the Italian priests, — for Francesca taught the peasants always zealously from her little Testament, — they moved down to Florence, to the place familiar to so many distinguished Americans, English, and Italians as a very Mecca, 21 Piazza Santa Maria Novella. They took rooms there in the late sixties for a few weeks' sojourn, and there they lived ever after, over forty years.

On the outside of the house is now an inscription especially interesting because of the Alexanders' friendship with Garibaldi at Bellosguardo. It reads: "Da questa casa Giuseppe Garibaldi, soldato costante dell' Italia e dell' Umanità, il 22 Ott., 1867, al popolo plaudente, indirizzava le memorabili parole, 'O Roma, O Morte!,' preludiando la spedizione dimentava che restituiva all' Italia la sua capitale, all' Umanità il libero esame.

"Questa lapida á eterna memoria posero i Garibaldini Toscani Oggi, 2 Luggio, 1882." ¹

To his soldiers the intrepid leader had said: "I offer neither pay, nor quarters, nor provisions. I offer hunger, thirst, forced

1. "From this house, Giuseppe Garibaldi, faithful soldier of Italy and of humanity, said, on Oct. 22, 1867, to the applauding people, the memorable words, 'Rome or death,' just before the desperate expedition which restored to Italy its capital, to humanity the ideal of freedom.

"The Tuscan Garibaldians erect this stone on July 2, 1882, for an everlasting memorial."



21 PIAZZA SANTA MARIA NOVELLA, FLORENCE

Marked by the Garibaldi Tablet

marches, battle, and death. Let him who loves his country in his heart, and not with his lips only, follow me."

The Square itself, named for Cimabue's great Virgin in the church here, is better known, I think, than any other in Florence. Mrs. Browning speaks of it in "Aurora Leigh":

And past the quays, Maria Novella's Place,
In which the mystic obelisks stand up
Triangular, pyramidal, each based
On a single trine of brazen tortoises,
To guard that fair church, Buonarroti's Bride,
That stares out from her large blind dial-eyes,
Her quadrant and armillary dials, black
With rhythms of many suns and moons, in vain
Enquiry for so rich a soul as his.

That exquisite Dominican church Francesca loved best of all in this city of beauty. She loved, too, the Loggia di San Paolo opposite, with the Della Robbia medallions and the touching lunette of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic meeting.

The hotel in which the Alexanders had rooms so long is called Hotel Bonciani. There is a pen-and-ink drawing by Francesca herself of this house, in "Tuscan Songs." It is one of the Pitti palaces, and in the entrance-hall is the Pitti coat-of-arms. There, too, are, or were, Pitti portraits, one by Bronzino, which were sold to the Alexanders for a song by the last Pitti, Maddalena, who lived downstairs when they came.

They occupied two floors. On one were two bed-rooms, the Salon, the dining-room, and living-room: up two flights of marble stairs. Then, at the top of the house was Francesca's little work-room, and the terrace opening from it.

All the rooms gave an impression of containing rather too many things, for the family had a tendency to accumulate. Among these were exquisite possessions, as well as many that were valueless.

The Salon was a high, stately room, with an open fire. It was crowded with pictures which the father had collected, many of them lovely and precious. I remember Francesca showed me one Orcagna, two pictures by Giotto and Ghirlandajo, a triptych by Perugino (the Madonna, St. John, and St. Mary Magdalene), four or five of the Giotto School, a huge one of the Virgin showing the Bambino to St. Francis; portraits of Francesca at fifteen (in a big sunbonnet), of her mother at eighteen, and of her grandmother. Then there were autographed photographs of Ruskin, Carmen Sylva, Lowell, and other friends, and embroidery done on white silk by her grandmother. Besides all that hung on the walls, there was carved furniture, marble busts of emperors and cardinals, tapestry and crimson damask, and cases full of books and manuscripts. (The attributions given here were her own.)

The dining-room was lined with heavily carved black cases, full of marvellous old East India china, all brought from America, purchased long ago from sea-captains. Here, too, were more paintings, a very early one (eleventh or twelfth century) of St. Thomas, an oil-portrait by Francesca of the improvisatrice Giannina Milli, and another of a man wrongfully kept in prison for many years.

In Florence, as in the old days in Lynn, the Alexanders were full of overflowing hospitality. Dinner was at queer hours, — four or five, — but that made no difference in the pleasure with which their invitations were always accepted. Several friends



THE DRAWING-ROOM
AT 21 PIAZZA SANTA MARIA NOVELLA
From photographs by the Dowager Duchess of Sermoneta

have written of their delightful experiences when they dined at No. 21. And as they speak of occasions years apart I add them here. Lady Samuel, wife of the High Commissioner of Palestine, writes:

I still remember, after nearly twenty-five years, my first visit to the old ladies. We were invited to dinner and I seem to see now the high, dark dining-room, lighted by tall candles in tall silver candle-sticks. Two tall, dark-coated and knee-breeched waiters in white gloves flitted noiselessly about the table. With courteous consideration the old lady had provided special food for that meal, knowing that the Jews avoid certain dishes.

Mrs. Cornelius C. Felton of Cambridge, daughter-in-law of a former President of Harvard, a distinguished Greek professor, says: "The elders sat down to a sumptuous and lengthy meal, while my baby was put to sleep on a richly carved marble sarcophagus"; and another time, she speaks of "Francesca and her friend standing a moment to say grace before sitting down."

Miss Eastman of Wellesley, former head of Dana Hall School, says:

There were two plates on the table and silver on a side-table, but we found the lunch was for us only, as Miss Alexander cannot eat what she had so kindly ordered for us. The man came in at once with a tray of roast chicken, French peas, bread and butter, and Miss Alexander disappeared to get some cake and fruit which she had bought for us. As we began to eat, she drew her chair up between us, but it was so much more natural to talk with her than to eat that she exclaimed, "You are not eating! Now I will run downstairs and get my bread and coffee and then you will eat too." She soon came back with her large cup of coffee, crumbed full of bread, and the pleasant talk went on. After our second breakfast, she took her knitting, a coarse white sock for a man, and we talked, sitting close beside her. Later, she insisted on coming all the way down with us, saying she lived on the stairs.

Of course, when I myself went back to Florence both were old, so all the ceremony was simplified. I remember that Francesca was constantly hopping up to attend to her mother's dinner in the next room, because the daughter never let anyone else do anything for her mother. Old Raffaello, the porter, waited on us, bringing up everything from some mysterious place downstairs.

Francesca's own bedroom was cold, with no sun shining in, and no fire. By her bed, under glass, stood a magnificent Gian Da Bologna crucifix, with figures in ivory of the Virgin and St. John. Here hung her portrait of Beatrice degli Ontani, the most famous improvisatrice of all (for whose marriage was written the stornello, "Weep, little town, your star is going over the border"). Here also was a painting of St. Francis, and pen-and-ink sketches of a brilliant Italian who died at twenty-two. Later she had here also the lovely portrait of her mother at eighteen, which had hung in the salon.

At the very top of the house was Francesca's workroom, whence emanated all the work we so love. There was no elevator. She had to climb all those flights of stairs. It was a tiny room, looking out over the roofs and chimneys to the hills beyond the city. The floor was of red-brick tiles. A large table with a white cloth stood in the middle of the room, and cabinets, desks, and small tables lined the white-washed walls. It used to be full of flowers, always, in great blue and yellow jars. A few large old chairs were about, but the great interest of the room was the pieces of Medici tapestry and the wonderful pictures on the walls. No space for another seemed to be left, and from a large

Transfiguration, as big as two doors, to a small panel photograph, evidently every one had its history. One painting on wood of the Crucifixion, where angels were catching the falling blood, Francesca said was at least six hundred years old, but she had no idea of the painter. Two others of peasant women, one spinning, were her own portraits of her Italian friends. Of course, when I went back, the little room was only a place of memory of work done, for she could no longer use her eyes.

The room had the strong light necessary for such exceedingly fine work as she had done there. "She used," says Mrs. Felton, "only large sheets of white drawing paper, a small stylographic pen (used for both writing and drawing) and very black ink or sepia." Unfortunately, she worked with an ink that was not durable, so some of her drawings have faded sadly, and none of them bear long exposure to the light.

Apparently she did not need solitude in order to concentrate on her task, but as she worked she sang or talked to friends. She received there friends of every class, — Italian, English, and American, — giving to all affection, and to the needy, warm sympathy and help. The room was not only a studio, but a priest's confessional, a doctor's consulting-room, and a "mother's room," all in one. In Ruskin's Preface to "Christ's Folk in the Apennines," he says:

She has been in the habit of writing me little sketches or stories of her peasant friends, as they chance to visit her, either for the simple pleasure of watching her at her work, or, when they seek her counsel in their troubles or her sympathy in their good fortune. Her door is never closed to them: the drawing in progress advances under her hand with the same tranquillity through the children's babble and the mother's boast, and time is never wanting if they need her attentive care or active help.

Here Francesca helped the poor girl Giulia, sister of her beloved Ida, who wished to pass examination to be "maestra comunale," or school-teacher. "She was much there," says Francesca, "in those days, talking over her prospects and what was to be done." The sister Ida "spent long happy mornings in my painting-room . . . and confided to me all the events and interests of her short life." There Edwige used to bring Ida flowers, and Francesca had the congenial task of arranging them — "long streamers of ivy, and branches of winter roses and laurustinus and black and orange-colored berries from the hedges," as she lovingly enumerates them. Ida came sometimes twice a day to tell how Giulia's examination was coming on, and "if she came when I was not at home, would write a note with my pencil on a scrap of paper and pin it up on the window-frame where I should be sure to see it." When Giulia became a teacher, Ida came to show Francesca the dress-present for her, sure of sympathy. When Ida, in trouble over her love-affair, wrote to Francesca, then at San Marcello, in the mountains, Francesca answered "without losing a minute," and, until Ida's answer came, passed days "of almost unbearable suspense," so keen was her interest.

Out of this workroom opened her beloved little open terrace, looking down over rust-red chimney-pots to the church of Santa Maria Novella. Over it the swallows dipped and soared by day, and by night the bats flittered between its roses and the stars. Here sometimes in the latter years, she took her only exercise for three months together, not once going down to the street.

It had a tiny pergola, and a lovely copy of a Madonna by

Donatello, in basso-relievo, which she bought once at a flower-show in Lucca for eight francs (about \$1.60 then). The terrace was set about with great terra-cotta pots in which grew all the old familiar New England flowers, sweet alyssum, mignonette, lemon verbena from which you could pick one leaf to bruise and sniff luxuriously. The earth had been all brought up by men — “not,” she was quick to explain to me, “all at once.”

This wee garden was a constant joy to her. When the façade of the Duomo was completed, on the day of the celebration, she says,¹ “Bonciani borrowed all the best of the plants on the terrace, to make what he called ‘a prospettiva’ (or effect) at the door of the hotel.” Once she writes² Ruskin:

Today is Holy Thursday. . . . This morning I felt greatly honored by a request to lend some of my plants from the terrace for the Sepolcro [or Sepulchre] at S. Maria Maggiore. It makes me feel quite grand, almost as if my terrace were a real garden. . . . I suppose it is something the same sort of grandeur that . . . the blind man at l’Abetone felt when he told me that the hotel-keeper had offered to buy his house (a poor little cabin just falling to pieces). . . . The bees that swarm about it had given me a little the same feeling before and I sent my largest palm-tree and the prettiest of the wall-flowers and pansies.

Apropos of these bees, she describes to Ruskin, in another letter,³ one especial bee, which, she felt sure, was the same which returned every spring to her terrace, “usually making her a visit in the workroom.” She says:

He is so gentle that he will let me stand close by and watch him, while he gathers honey. He makes himself perfectly at home, examining all the flowers and hums about as if he were in a field, often close to my face. I wonder if he knows me? Polissena, who has kept bees, says they are “blessed of the Lord,”

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 146. 2. *R. S. of T.*, p. 324. 3. *C. F. in A.*, pp. 110–112.

and that whenever one goes to the hive, one should ask for a blessing, in the Lord's name. . . . If one omit this custom, the bees don't like it.

She adds that bees like to be talked to, on which Ruskin comments that people say he has no small talk, but he has n't tried his wits on his bees! She never fails to notice with discriminating joy the flowers, wherever she is. In "Christ's Folk in the Apennines," she writes Ruskin¹ that she "wonders that his little class of girls did n't care for Botany," which she always found delightful, though she never had much time to study it: "and I wonder especially that among the cruciferae flowers, not one of them thought of wall-flowers, my own favorites." Ruskin says crustily, in response, that his class "had their attention restricted to cress and cabbage, and not permitted to wander towards wild and useless things like wall-flowers!"

At Casciana, 1885, she writes: "the field and hedges are one garden of roses, honey-suckle, acacia, gladiolus, crimson and rose-coloured lupin." And again:²

The only show I went to in Lucca was the flower-show. . . . Some of the plants were very wonderful, expecially the palm-trees. I will not say anything about the orchids, knowing your [that is, Ruskin's] opinion of them. The plants developed by cultivation I do not care quite so much about, and often think them prettier in their natural state; but those splendid palms and tropical ferns, I should never be tired of looking at.

Most of her letters speak of flowers, of exchange of seeds and blossoms. A friend says: "We talked of flowers and she gave us the seeds of the jelly-flower nocturnal. . . . We promised to send her flower-seeds, those of wild geranium and trillium."

In a note to an English friend in Florence, December 30, 1888,

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 61.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

she says she had planned to go in person to thank her for a present of flowers:

The gentians are most beautiful and make me homesick for the Mountains. They are so like some that used to grow at Abetone. It seems to me a miracle that they ever blossomed; and another, that they arrived in Florence so perfectly fresh, here in the middle of winter! They are blossoming here beside me while I write — all but one, the largest of them, which I sent to Mr. Ruskin in a letter. He had such a love for these mountain-gentians. You were too good to share your treasure with me, but you could not have given them to anyone who would have cared for them more than I do. . . . Do you remember a primrose and a daisy and a violet that you sent to me last Spring? I planted all on the terrace and this year they are quite large plants.

She came to have extraordinary skill in drawing the flowers she so loved. In "Roadside Songs" the Italian and English are separated by leaves, twigs, blossoms, vines, so perfect as to need no color or perfume to add to our delighted recognition. She said: "As to the ornamentation of the pages, it seemed natural that roadside songs should have borders of roadside flowers."

Alas! now the little *terrazza* where she kept her pots of flowers has gone, like the gentle gardener. The unsentimental hotel owner says, with a shrug, "The dampness spoiled the ceilings beneath."

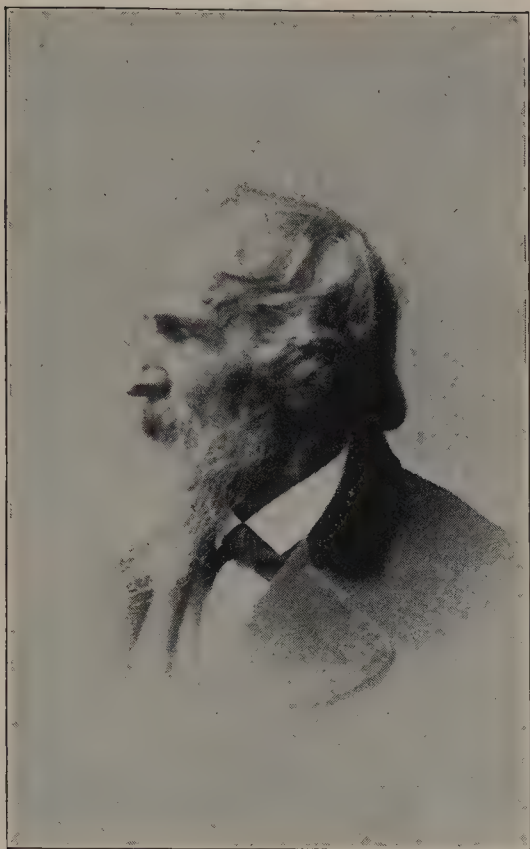
CHAPTER VII

LIFE IN FLORENCE; CHARITIES AND FRIENDS

IN THE lapse of years here, only one great grief came to them before the sadness of the close — the father's death, March 27, 1880, at the age of eighty. Francesca said she never wanted to wear jewelry any more, for the world had lost its glamour. To the end of her life, he remained her pattern and ideal. Whittier wrote a letter of sympathy to Aunt Lucia, in which he said: "He seemed to me a very sweet and noble man, a pure white soul."

The rich years the Alexanders spent in this house were so crowded with love and service that, if walls do really absorb the personality of those who dwell within them, these should have turned slowly to the warm gold of Titian or glowed like the mosaics in San Marco in Venice.

There was always a succession of delightful, notable people coming and going there, for almost everyone knew them, and was drawn by their unique charm, so refreshingly different from the rank and file, as well as by the daughter's exquisite work. In Motley's "Correspondence" (edited by G. W. Curtis, 1889) we have a letter, dated 1855, in which he says of Francesca: "Her facility and grace and purity of style are unequalled by any modern drawings I ever saw. . . . She is a young person of unquestionable genius and as simple and unaffected as she is clever."



FRANK ALEXANDER IN OLD AGE

From a photograph

In this house, unceasingly, they dispensed their bounteous charities, interested in "all who were desolate and oppressed." On one of my visits there, I saw a man who came every week from the country, bringing enough wild flowers to fill the rooms. As I watched him arranging them, Mrs. Alexander told me that this man had been imprisoned for life, on a false charge of throwing a bomb at the present king's father, only because he happened to be in the crowd that day. Though he was innocent, he was arrested and sent off to the galleys for years. He was, at the time, engaged to a beautiful opera-singer, who spared literally no effort for his release, but in vain. She never gave up hope. Several times, hearing that the pardon was on the way, she actually gave up engagements at distant places like Australia, to return to greet him, but was always disappointed. After years of alternate hope and despair, she died, still separated from him. So when the man was at last cleared and freed, he returned, old and penniless, adrift in a changed world, to find the woman he loved gone. In his need, he turned to the Alexanders, who took intense interest in him, and paid him a weekly sum, on condition that he tell no one of it. So quixotically faithful was he to his promise that he let himself be arrested on a charge of "vagrancy, with no visible means of support," rather than break his word, and had to be bailed out by his benefactress. In gratitude for all the Alexanders' kindness, he came, as I said, every Sunday, with an armful of flowers he had gathered in the country, to make fragrant the house of his friends. So hot was Mrs. Alexander's indignation at the story that she insisted on putting her opinion of the king and Italian justice into a book she was writing about

Italy, and as the publishers knew its appearance would mean trouble both for her and for them it was never published.

At Christmas, I remember seeing their drawing-room cluttered with wooden boxes of clothing and other comforts, to be sent to the needy — a process that went on all the year round. She kept people employed in sewing garments, to be given to others poorer. Every Easter, Francesca bought several lambs and had them roasted at the Bonciani. Then she cut them up herself and distributed them, piece-meal, to all the poor who came. Once, in a hard winter, they had a soup-kitchen near Via Cavour. Poor women came there to sew for others poorer still, and were given soup.

Many thought they were imposed on unmercifully, for their wealth was considered fabulous, and they were not very keen judges of character. At tearful tales of woe their hearts never had a twinge of misgiving: nor did it enter their gentle minds to wait for

Organized charity, scrimped and iced,
In the name of a cautious, statistical Christ.

Two men, whose only claim to her interest was that their father was converted while ploughing, were always at the house. They both sang and played the banjo and over and over told the story which had so thrilled her; but they were shrewd in turning to their advantage this innocent interest. Old "Antonio" used to come constantly, and Francesca thought up unnecessary errands for him to do, like posting letters, and then paid him five or ten lire each time. It is undoubtedly true that at the end many behaved very badly, in their mad greed to get something of that

legendary wealth. But, after all, she believed as the child did, in Josephine Peabody's dear poem, "The Beggar Man":

He only looked like a beggar-man,
As ragged, just, as any,
But he might have been an angel too,
So I gave him my penny.
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He might have been an angel, too!
But I saw he was n't any,
For he frowned at me, like that, you see,
When it was n't but one penny.
And now that's gone: and I don't care.
I'd rather not have any,
Than keep it, if an angel came,
And asked me for my penny.

She wrote, on the title-page of Mrs. Mason's book,

Sure they of many blessings
Should scatter blessings round,
As laden boughs in autumn fling
Their ripe fruit to the ground.

And as in her own poem in "Hidden Servants,"¹

God gave her grace to choose
Not the world's deceitful riches, but the wealth one cannot lose,
There are many heap up treasure, but it is not everyone
Who will take his treasure with him, when his earthly life is done.

Besides all they did for the poor, they loved to give to their friends. They had a basket full of little gifts and gave one to every friend who went to see them. I have many, but the one I prized most, an ivory crucifix, I gave to the Chapel of St. Anne, Arlington Heights. I never returned to America without taking a remembrance from the Alexanders to each of half a dozen

1. Page 152.

people here. One friend of theirs, a Scotch clergyman, Dr. Lindsay, always stayed at the Bonciani when he was in Florence. Just before he arrived, the Alexanders used to fill his lower drawer with delicious fruit and sweets. Lady Samuel says:

Mrs. Alexander and Francesca were always showering presents on us, and indeed, on all their friends; not only sweets and candied fruits at Christmas, but any curious object of interest that they thought we would like; once it was an old silver Jewish charm; another time a silver-bound prayer book; at another, a double heart-shaped photograph frame. Their visitors, on leaving Florence, were generally met at the railway station by a servant carrying one of the delightful little baskets of refreshments that the old lady loved to bestow. I remember that ours contained not only food for the journey and a bottle of wine, but also doylies and even forks with our initials on them. Fellow travellers in a railway carriage, each with an Alexander basket, have been known to fraternize on the strength of that bond and to become acquainted through their mutual friend.

Another grateful recipient of an Alexander lunch-basket was W. D. Howells, who insisted, in his amusing note of thanks, that it saved them all from starvation, on their journey to Siena.

Like St. Francis again, Francesca was a great lover. Indeed, it seems to me that her most marked characteristic was her "genius for friendship." Dr. Mille said to me one day, "I wonder if Francesca was ever in love? I don't think so, for she was not of this earth." Perhaps not in love with one man, because she loved so dearly all mankind. Her friends were of all kinds, high and low; she made no distinctions. Princes, countesses, the Patriarch of Venice, famous writers and artists — Lowell, Whittier, Ruskin, O. W. Holmes, and the rest; humble peasants; friends of the old American days, never forgotten; of the Italian days; of the last days. She saw their souls and loved them all equally.

And all alike felt it a precious privilege to be counted her friends. As Miss Whiting says, in "The Golden Road": "That particular order of the universe which we know as the great world made no impression at all upon her. She would have thanked the poorest peasant with the utmost courtesy. She could not have done more for one of the Strozzi princesses. She lived in a world where conventional distinction had little recognition." To her, a friend in a 'kerchief was as dear as a friend in a coronet, though Mrs. Newman said she was just a bit partial to widows in distress! She was unsparing of herself in friendship, as is shown constantly in her letters, her sympathetic sharing of the troubles of others, in her touching appreciation of every little thing done for her. Entirely humble and unselfconscious, she had a "heart at leisure from itself to soothe and sympathize."

How she responded to affection, and cherished and admired her friends! She kept tenderly the peasant girl Ida's signature, "La sua Ida chi Li vuol tanto bene,"¹ and records with deep feeling Ida's cry, "O signora Francesca, how I have wanted you to come!" adding, "with her beautiful eyes looking into my face as if she could never see enough of me." To another peasant, Polissena "of the wonderful peace," she presented² the Reliquary, containing relics of St. Francis, which Ruskin had received from a Capuchin monk in Rome in 1874. To "the rich and noble Enrichetta," an Italian friend of another station, she says: "We went for advice about everything in this world and the next and have great reason to be thankful that we did so";

1. Your Ida, who loves you so dearly.

2. *C. F. in A.*, p. 139.

Enrichetta¹ of the "constant great hidden charities," to whom "nobody was fallen too low for her compassion," who employed much of her great fortune in "buying old, ruined, worn-out estates, putting the houses and land in order, and making the contadini comfortable."

Another life-long friend was "Angelina," who was like a sister to her for twenty-five years, very rich, evidently a saint.

I do not think [she says]² anyone ever came near her without being the better for it and without receiving some kindness from her. She had her house full of all the forlorn people she could find — the poor, the shabby, the broken in health and spirit, the disgraced by unworthy relations, all the people that the world had turned its back upon found a true and warm friend in Angelina.

And again:³

During a long illness of her husband, it became necessary for her to take upon herself the administration of their very large estate . . . and I often wonder if any great property was administered in such a way before! Sometimes when I went to her house the floors would be covered with flasks of wine, jars of honey, fruit, chickens, geese, pheasants — a little of everything: it was an arrival from the estate. And in a few hours, all or nearly all would have disappeared — gone to the houses of the poor or sick, or in some way needy people. . . . She never seemed to care for her great wealth except to make as many people happy with it as she could. I doubt if she knew that she was good, though she knew enough of all the good in everyone else.

Then she writes of this modern Saint Elizabeth as ill at the inn at Bassano, and so sweet, adding later, "She has gone, no doubt, to the Heaven promised to little children and to those who are like them." How congenial this lovely friend was to Francesca it is easy to guess, for all she writes of her might be said of herself.

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 133.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

Very dear to her, also, was Countess Silvia of Bassano, in whose palace she and her mother stayed for months together; and Signor Zanchetta there, to whom she wrote constantly. Another friend was the daughter of the sculptor Pampaloni who carved those two great statues in the Piazza del Duomo — an old lady when she knew her. Two other Italian friends of noble rank she mentions in an interesting way. Once she writes; ¹

One day a young girl had come to see the book by appointment: she is a lovely beauty, the daughter of a duke from Modena. . . . Soon a friend came from near L'Abetone, a poor contadina with some eggs, chestnuts, and mushrooms. . . . She recognized some familiar scenes [in the book] and the young girl made room for her to sit down beside her and they looked through it together, talking over it, in manners and voices equally sweet, gentle, and self-possessed.

The other was a baby-countess, whom Ruskin labels “the Doge’s daughter.” Francesca said: ²

A countess came to see me the other day, aged three years, a descendant of those doges of the Tiepolo family who did so much for Venice once upon a time, you know. The young lady would have nothing to say to me at first and it was in vain that I tried to tempt her with fruit or cake or with songs or stories. But her mother wanted to see what I was drawing and I brought in Santa Rosa; and no sooner did the child see it than she brought her little chair and placed it before me, then planted herself there, and remained absorbed in deep study of the picture.

Ruskin adds that he likes the Italian title of countess because young ladies may (as in this case) be countesses at three years old, but can’t be marchionesses or duchesses without getting married, “which at once diminishes my interest in them!”

Francesca’s American friends were, of course, too many to enumerate, both those who had been her mother’s before her,

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 319.

2. *C. F. in A.*, p. 190.

and those who came to them for Francesca's sake especially. Out of the host who knew and loved her, I have chosen just a few to speak of by name, chiefly because these are especially mentioned in her own books.

Francesca made friends of all her servants; friends as dear and warm as those with "nine-hundred-years old names." Once when she was ill, I remember, a friend found her in bed, so covered with books as to be uncomfortable. But when the friend suggested removing these, Francesca said, "No, the servants put them there and I do not want to break their hearts by taking them away."

The closest of these servant-friends was Edwige (Italian, Edovise), of whom she said, "Whoever knows me knows Edwige." This Edwige Gualtieri originally came from four miles outside Porta Romana. After many and grievous troubles, she was left a widow with five little children, whom she supported with the greatest difficulty. But when all hope seemed over, she was found by Francesca, and from that day knew only love and care. Ruskin comments after hearing her story,¹ "We shall have a better idea forever of all that is serviceablest in earthly duty and sacrest in mortal sorrow and purest in the religion which has alike known and visited the affliction of the fatherless and widow." He thinks the story of her children's housekeeping the loveliest Francesca describes in "Roadside Songs"; and whenever I went up to Bellosguardo I thought of that little pathetic group, waiting for Edwige at midnight, in the deserted Piazza San Francesco.

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 223.

Francesca writes: ¹ "She entered our service (at Bellosguardo) as my particular attendant, coming every morning and staying with me for some hours. And since then the course of our lives has been together."

Edwige accompanied her everywhere. She writes that, when she was drawing the picture of Our Lord and the Samaritan Woman, "It was a lovely early Spring day and the path where we sat, Edwige and I, was as white with daisies in some places as if it had been snowing." Of their stays together in Venice, she says: ²

In Venice, a fine evening towards sunset, Edwige and I were leaning out of a window over the Grand Canal and watching the sunset lights on the old palaces, when all at once a swallow shot by over the water below us, bringing a sudden light, that was not like sunset at all, into the worn, patient face beside me. Suddenly she seemed to recognize something of her childhood among the decaying magnificences about us, and she repeated the old words of a *rispetto* learned in her childhood, keeping her eyes on the bird until it was out of sight.

In January, 1881, she says: ³ "Edwige still continues her profound astronomical researches. The other day, as we were looking from the window, she said to me, very solemnly, 'The longer I live, the more I wonder at the greatness of the Almighty. Only to think that He has made the moon and hung it directly over Venice, and yet it gives light to all the world.'" Again, August 9, 1888, Francesca writes from Cortina: ⁴

The other evening I found Edwige on the balcony, in devout contemplation of the stars. She said, "When I was a little girl, there were no clocks or watches and people used to tell time by the stars. My father used to. There

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 219.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 298.

3. *C. F. in A.*, part VII.

4. *Ibid.*

were certain stars he called the *Stelli Mercanti*, and when he had a journey to take, he used to watch for them. Our old people in the country had no learning such as is taught in the schools, but they knew certain things and what they did know they knew well. People nowadays would say they were very unfortunate, to be without watches, but God thought even of them. He never forgets anything, and really they were better off, in a way, than people now, for the stars never get out of order, and watches do, often."

She says further: "I used to amuse myself by taking Edwige to see the pictures and listening to her remarks about them. She seems to think that she knows all about the habits, dresses, etc., of saints and angels."

Of Edwige's remarks, the prettiest, I think, was that which Francesca tells, after she has given exquisitely the story of St. Christopher, adding humbly,¹ "I have done as well as I could from memory, and with no books to look at, only Edwige helped me a little." Then she goes on to say that Edwige burst into tears, as she said,

"Poor man, how happy he must have been! Only to think of finding out that he had been carrying the Lord! and it makes us so happy to do any little thing for Him!" I told her that whatever we did for His children we did for Him. "Yes," she said, "that is in the Gospel, but" — and she looked away into vacancy, as if she were trying to see something, as her habit is when she is thinking, — "I think, do not you, when our friends die, no matter how much we have done, we are always wishing we had done more. Well, when we go to Heaven, we shall feel like that: we shall be sorry we have not done more for the Lord Jesus."

Ruskin says ² Edwige

was an extremely useful critic of her mistress' work, trustful but tenderly corrective; one day she watched Francesca laboring long over a piece of complex foliage, with evident fatigue: the drawing also not prospering to her quiet ser-

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 308.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 180.

vant's mind. At last, with mild and softly smiling reproof, "Are you not trying to do as well as the good God?" says Edwige.

And another time,¹ when Francesca was looking at the sky and said, "I wonder why I can't paint a sky like that?" Edwige said, "I suppose it is because the Master can do better than the scholar."

The companionship of this faithful servant, who could not even read, was a great joy to her mistress. Edwige was full of naïve and charming legends, which she believed like gospel. Better than all, she was true-hearted, a staunch friend through all the long years she served.

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 221.

CHAPTER VIII

ENTER RUSKIN

THEIR most famous friendship, however, and the one most far-reaching in its results, was that with Ruskin, but for whom Francesca's books would probably never have been published. The Alexanders knew well Ruskin's old friends Mr. Henry Roderick Newman, an American artist living in Piazza Rossi, just beyond the Ponte Vecchio, and his charming English wife. (The latter I saw often, in my visit of 1923. She lived till 1924, a sprightly, witty, charming old lady.) Mr. Newman was a distinguished worker along the same line as Ruskin, who admired his exquisite water-colors of Florentine architecture and Italian scenery. Mr. Newman had been at Coniston and was working for the Guild. Some of his drawings Ruskin had purchased for his St. George Museum. Mrs. Newman's uncle was of the Telford family, partners of Ruskin's father, so she had known Ruskin from childhood.

In the fall of 1882, Ruskin was travelling over old scenes of his youth, to refresh his memories for the letters in "Fors." Among other places he visited Florence, and was told by Mr. Newman of the beautiful manuscript book "Roadside Songs." Full of interest, Ruskin desired to see it and was taken to Francesca's studio, at the top of the house. Collingwood, in his "Life of Ruskin," says:

In these ladies' home he found his own aims, in religion, philanthropy, and art, realized in an unexpected way. Miss Alexander's drawing at first

struck him by its sincerity. He had been always the enemy of that acquired skill and paraded cleverness which become so fatiguing to the experienced critic. He had always called out for human interest, the evidence of sympathy, the poetry of feeling in art: and he found this in Miss Alexander . . . not professionally learned, but full of observation and the tokens of affectionate interest in her subject. As to style, she fulfilled his own teaching of bygone years, the combination of free point-work with pure line without blotting or bungling; and her sense of color and texture compensated for any weakness in anatomy and composition. Not only did she draw beautifully, but she also wrote a beautiful hand; and it had been one of his old sayings that missal-writing, rather than missal-painting, was the admirable thing in mediaeval art. . . . In religious matters, her American common-sense saw through her neighbors, saw the good in them as well as their weakness, and she was friendly, not only in society, but in spiritual things, with the worthy village-priest, as with T. P. Rossetti, the leader of the Protestant "Brethren," whom she called her pastor, cousin of the artist and in his way, no less remarkable a man. It is hardly too much to say that he did for evangelical religion in Italy what Gabriel Rossetti did for poetical art in England, he showed the path to sincerity and simplicity.

One evening, before dinner, Ruskin brought back to the hotel in Florence a drawing of a lovely girl lying dead in the sunset, and a little note-book. "I want you to look over this," he said, in the way, but not quite in the tone, with which the usual manuscript, submitted for criticism, was tossed to a secretary to taste. It was the "Story of Ida," written by her friend; a title altered by Mr. Ruskin to "The Story of Ida: Epitaph on an Etrurian Tomb."

After a short stay at Lucca, he returned to his new friends and did not leave Florence finally until he had acquired the wonderful collection of 110 drawings, with beautifully written text, in which Miss Alexander had enshrined "The Roadside Songs of Tuscany."

In his diary, October 5, 1882, Ruskin writes: "Thunder again at five left me good for little this morning, but pleased at thought of buying for Sheffield the lovely book of Italian peasants by Miss Alexander." Again, October 10, he writes: "Well pleased with myself for having bought Miss Alexander's book, showing all I want to say about Italian peasantry." And yet again, Oc-

tober 11, he records: "I never knew such vivid goodness and innocence in any living creature as in this Mrs. and Miss Alexander."

The acquaintance thus begun speedily ripened into warm and life-long friendship. In his last letters in "*Fors Clavigera*," we see how much he owed to this friendship. After two or three visits, they began a correspondence which continued to the end of his life. "*Christ's Folk in the Apennines*" includes her almost daily letters to him, most of them answers to questions in his almost daily letters to her. Mrs. Felton said:

The Ruskin letters had not only directions about drawings he wanted, but were also interspersed with friendly and intimate accounts of his life and occupations and reading, as well as his opinions on public matters. His critical spirit was shown but also his noble and keen discernment and charming friendliness. Mrs. Alexander kept all the letters and arranged them in sequence, but one day they mysteriously disappeared, to everyone's grief. Francesca comforted her mother by saying, "But we had read them so often that we knew them by heart."

Others kept coming, of course. Much later, her mother told me she had destroyed forty more by accident. Mrs. Newman commented: "Many of these were written during his brainstorms and are perhaps better lost." Yet a considerable number remain and will, some day, it is hoped, be published.

Ruskin called Francesca his "Sorella" and "Sorel," and she called him "Fratello." In the "*Hawarden Letters*," Ruskin, writing to Miss Gladstone, January 27, 1886, says: "I'm sending on your letter, as I did the last, to my Sorella Francesca, who wrote back I ought not to quarrel with you, but women are stupid creatures"; and again, writing April 2, 1886, he says:

"I'm a little glad of a word from Hawarden again, though I'm frightfully sulky with everybody in the world except my Sorella at Florence (and she's a horrid Evangelical and thinks St. Paul was a wicked man, before he was unhorsed)."

Apropos of the endearing nickname "Fratello," I remember that in "Memorials of Burne-Jones," Lady Burne-Jones says that Ruskin told her of some old friends, whom he had not seen for years, who called him John, and she comments: "We felt how few people could ever do this and how sweet it must have been to him." Ruskin was naturally very affectionate. Lady Burne-Jones says further that when he was away from home he wrote or telegraphed his parents every day. Burne-Jones himself, writing of Ruskin, says: "What a dear he is! Of his sweetness, his talk, his looks, how debonnaire he is to everyone, of the nimbus round his head, of his wings to match, consult some future occasion of talk."

Francesca was fond of him and found great comfort in receiving his letters and, in return, filling letters to him with stories of her friends, knowing they were poured into such an understanding ear. In 1886 she writes to him;¹ "But, my Fratello, I could not help being surprised to find that you were surprised to see how much I cared for your letters. I never thought to tell you of it because I supposed you knew. Does not everyone care for your letters, though not just in the way that I do?" Often she speaks of her mother and herself reading with pleasure Ruskin's "Stones of Venice." Once she tells him:² "Mama says everything relating to you seems to bring a blessing not only to us but to others."

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 184.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Newman told me she thought Francesca was "not so much thrilled by the famous friendship as her mother, to whom it was a new lease of life." It was like Margaret Ogilvie's answer when someone asked her if she would like to be a certain famous man, and she said, "No, but I would be windy of being his mother."

In the Alexanders Ruskin found guides to the religious peace lost long before. Of course, from his boyhood, when he read the Bible through from cover to cover every year, till its splendid, sonorous English style became his own, he had always had an exalted, lovely ideal of what Christianity might be. For instance, in "Roadside Songs,"¹ he slips into one of his comments this opinion on forms of prayer. "All that has ever been alleged against forms of worship is justly said only of those which are compiled without sense and employed without sincerity. The earlier services of the Catholic church teach men to think as well as pray. But did ever a soul in its immediate distress or desolation find the forms of petition learned in childhood lifeless on the lips of age?" But, of late years, bitterness and disillusionment had made him almost despair of finding his ideal realized. Collingwood says Ruskin had been driven away from Protestantism by the Waldenses at Turin, and had long wandered, rudderless, until "he found harbor at last with this disciple of a modern evangelist, the frequenter of the poor little meeting-house of outcast Italian Protestants." Francesca, whose faith both in God and in her fellow men had never wavered, was amazed at his doubts. She wrote to him:² "But is it possible that it is only lately that you began to

1. Page 142.

2. *R. S. of T.*, p. 328.

know about hidden servants? I keep thinking how sad your life must have been, if you have not known them. For the outside of things in the world always seems so ugly.”

Her simple, childlike faith and trust upheld and strengthened him even in the dark, bewildered last days. April 3, 1884, she writes him:¹

Care Fratello, those two last letters which you wrote to Mama made me very sad, because they made me understand much that I did not before! it seems to bring you so much nearer to me, now that I know of the great shadow on your life. I will not write about it, for I do not think that such words as mine could be of any comfort to you. But I could not help saying this much. You know that you said I might speak to you as I did to my dear father, and you know very well that I could not have seen him in trouble and said nothing. But I will say no more, for I know very well that there are troubles which the dear Lord Himself, who has suffered more than any of us and understands all, can help us bear. (And indeed, I think that is true of all sorts of trouble. I find even the little ones become unbearable if I try to bear them alone.) Only think. Was it not strange! Just as I was writing those words, in a sadder spirit than I ever wrote to you before, I heard the happiest and most hopeful sound that I ever hear in the year, the swallows come back to the cortile! There is one pair of swallows that have built under the roof for I don't know how many years, and when they come back in the spring, it is like the return of old friends. They are the little singing swallows, that have to me the gayest note of any birds, and they could not help a little song of delight at seeing the old house again. I know how they always behave the first day. They are tired, poor little things!

“But never mind the swallows now (only it was strange that they should come just at this minute!). There were two or three things in those letters of yours that gave me a great deal to think of. You say that you have not time for so many things that you want to do, and that you even find life too short. I am sorry that you feel so because it must take away much of the comfort from your life. But you remember what Suora Marianna said? “When the Lord gives us anything to do, He takes care of us while we are doing it.” You will live until you have done all that He wants you to do for Him and His

1. *C. F. in A.*, part VII.

people, and then you will want to go to Him; Life and death belong to Him and not to us. Do try not to think of these things. He never laid any such burden upon us.

In such utterly simple, loving wise did she minister to her weary "Brother." In a note at the end of "Roadside Songs," he says: ¹

I have to thank the authoress for help she has brought us in these days of spiritual darkness and worldly trial, when faith is failing and love is cold: giving us sight of the truth of God and the sweetness of His creatures, out of the windows of Heaven, — as if indeed she had answered thus our literal asking, "Come to the window, lady, give me light."

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 315.

CHAPTER IX

THE PRECIOUS BOOKS

I. AS RUSKIN AND OTHERS SAW THEM

BUT it is Ruskin's relations with Francesca as an artist that chiefly concern us. On his first visit to her Francesca showed Ruskin "The Story of Ida," which he bought. Then the book of "Roadside Songs" was produced. He declared, says Mr. Spielman, the value of the volume to be one thousand pounds, adding that he would think over the book and advise what had best be done with it. The artist declared that the price had been fixed by her father at no more than six hundred pounds, and that she would take for it neither more nor less. Next morning Professor Ruskin dispatched a letter, in which he proposed to acquire the book himself. A copy of this characteristic communication "I [that is, Mr. Spielman] have been so fortunate as to secure, together with permission to set it before the reader."

Florence, 7th Oct., 1882

DEAR MRS. ALEXANDER,

I've taken a new pen — it is all I can! — I wish I could learn an entirely new writing from some pretty hem of an angel's robe, to tell you with what happy and reverent admiration I saw your daughter's drawings yesterday: reverent not only of a quite heavenly gift of genius in a kind I have never before seen, — but also of the entirely sweet and loving spirit which animated and sanctified the work and the serenity which it expressed in the purest faiths and best purposes of life. (It thunders as I write, as if all the fiends of the air were trying to hinder me from saying what is in my heart.) In absolute skill of drawing, and perception of all that is loveliest in human creatures — and in the flowers that live for them — I think these works are in their kind

unrivalled — and that they do indeed represent certain elements of feeling and power peculiar to this age in which we are entering on new dispensations of thought and hope: good for me to see especially — because I have hitherto been brought into collision with all its evil, and have been much cast out from the knowledge of its good.

The earlier thunder of the morning kept me awake, to some good purpose, for it gave me time to think over all these things, in their relation to my work in England: and I came to the conclusion that I might, for the service of the English peasantry — be mean enough to take Miss Alexander at her frank word as to the price of the book. I will give six hundred guineas for it with more than pleasure — if at that price I may be permitted to place it in the St. George's Museum — but in order to its perfect usefulness there, I am going to pray Miss Alexander to write — by way of introduction to it, such brief sketches as she may find easy of arrangement, of the real people whose portraits are given — what you and she told me in the little time of looking over it would be almost enough, but one of my chief objects in obtaining the book will be the conveying to the mind of our English peasantry — not to say princes — some sympathetic conception of the reality of the sweet souls of Catholic Italy.

I am going to ask Mr. Newman to intercede with you and Miss Alexander for me in all these matters. One more quite personal favour — I scarcely like to ask, but yet still venture — that I might see Miss Alexander draw a little bit of a flower. I have really no conception how that work can be done, and I am the more personally interested in it because it is the glorification and perfection of a method once recommended in my "Elements of Drawing" and afterwards rejected as too difficult.

If this might be — or indeed, whether it may be or not! — I trust to be permitted to wait upon you both, once more — before leaving Florence. Mr. Newman will tell me your pleasure and your time — and so I remain, my dear Mrs. and Miss Alexander,

Your grateful and faithful servant

JOHN RUSKIN.

The precious volume, thus acquired, had been seen previously by Sir Frederick Leighton, who had urged its publication. Indeed, he had made preparations for having it done under his direction. In the course of time, in 1885, Ruskin had it published



SANTA ROSA

*From the pen-and-ink drawing made by Francesca for Ruskin and by him presented
to his "Child Society of Friends to Living Creatures"*

by Mr. George Allen. Mr. Spielman says that twenty or so of the plates were too minutely fine in workmanship to be reproduced by any existing process of printing, so these were photographed.

Ruskin was founding, at that time, his school of technical art at Sheffield, and he wished specimens of Francesca's work to illustrate his ideas. So he ordered certain additional drawings, giving very minute directions as to subject and treatment. These were a series of drawings in which other of her peasant models were used to illustrate legends of the saints. One of these, Santa Rosa, now at Brantwood, is referred to in "Christ's Folk in the Apennines."¹ There were also drawings of mountains, trees, rocks, peaks, and that difficult waterfall that Francesca speaks of. When they were finished, he bound them in vellum, but told Francesca he would send a messenger for them, not to risk losing them. He sent a little Quaker lady, a great source of interest to the artist, and she took the book, which represented a year's work, and for which Ruskin paid handsomely. When it arrived in England it was unbound and each page exhibited separately, as had been done with "Roadside Songs."

March 9, 1883, Ruskin gave his first Oxford lecture, on "Realistic Schools of Painting," a lecture chiefly concerned with Holman Hunt and Rossetti. In the course of it, however, he held up before his audience Francesca's drawing of the sleep of Ida, saying,

Next to these illustrations of Norwegian economy [pictures just referred to] I have brought you a drawing of deeper and less imitable power. It is by a girl of quite peculiar gift, whose life has hitherto been spent in quiet and unassuming devotion to her art and its subjects. I would fain have said an Eng-

1. Page 189.

lish girl, but — she is an American. [Ruskin had previously said of America: “No country which borrows its laws, its language, its religion from another nation can ever hope to be great in art.” He goes on now to say:] But for twenty years she has lived with her mother among the peasants of Tuscany, under their olive-avenues in summer — receiving them, as they choose to come to chat with her, in her little room by Santa Maria Novella in Florence, during the winter. They come to her as their loving guide and friend and sister in all their work and pleasure and suffering. I lean on the last word. For those of you who have entered into the heart of modern Italy know that there is probably no more oppressed, no more afflicted order of gracious and blessed creatures, God’s poor, who have not yet received their consolation, than the mountain peasantry of Tuscany and Romagna. What their minds are, and what their state, and what their treatment those who do not know Italy may best learn, if they can bear the grief of learning it, from Ouida’s photographic story of “A Village Commune.” Yet amidst all this, the sweetness of their natural character is undisturbed, their ancestral religious faith is unshaken, their purity and simplicity of household life uncorrupted. They may perish, by our neglect or our cruelty, but they cannot be degraded. Among them, as I have told you, this American girl has lived, from her youth up, with her (now widowed) mother, who is as eagerly, and which is the chief matter, as sympathizingly benevolent as herself. The peculiar art gift of the younger lady is rooted in this sympathy, the gift of truest expression of feelings serene in their rightness, and a love of beauty divided between the peasants and the flowers that live round Santa Maria del Fiore. This power she has trained by its limitation, severe, and in my experience unexemplified, to work in light and shade only, with the pure pen-line. But the total strength of her intellect and fancy being concentrated in this engraver’s method, it expresses of every subject what she loves best, in simplicity undebased by any accessory of minor emotion.

She has thus drawn, in faithfulest portraiture, of these peasant Florentines the loveliness of the young and the majesty of the aged; she has listened to their legends, written down their sacred songs: and illustrated with the sanctities of mortal life their traditions of immortality. I have brought you only one drawing today: in the spring I trust you shall have many: but this is enough, just now. It is drawn from memory only, but the fond memory which is as sure as sight. . . . It is the last sleep from which she waked on this earth, of a young Florentine girl, who had brought heaven down to earth, as truly as ever saint of old, while she lived, and of whom even I, who never saw her,

cannot believe that she is dead. . . . Of this, and of the rest of these drawings, I have much to say to you. But this first and last, that they are representations of beautiful human nature, such as could only have been found among people living in the pure Christian faith — such as it was, and is, since the twelfth century.

Again in his third Oxford lecture, May, 1883, a lecture on Sir Frederick Leighton and Alma-Tadema, he spoke of Francesca's work, saying:

I bring you today the portrait of a Tuscan sibyl [that is, the improvisatrice Beatrice] such as they have been and still are. She herself is still living: Her portrait is the first drawing illustrating the book of the peasantry of Val d'Arno, which I obtained possession of in Florence last year. Of which book I will now read you part of the preface, in which the authoress gives you the story of the life of this Etrurian Sibyl. [Here he quotes from Francesca's book, continuing] There are just one or two points I want you to note in this biography. The girl is put, in her youth, to three kinds of noble work. She is a shepherdess, like St. Genevieve: a spinner and knitter, like Queen Bertha: chiefly and most singularly, she is put to help her father in the pontifical art of bridge-building. Gymnastic to purpose, you observe. In the last number of your favorite English Chronicle, the proud mother says of her well-trained daughters that there is not one of them who could not knock down her own father. Here is a strong daughter who can help her father — a Grace Darling of the rivers instead of the sea. These are the first three things to be noted of her. Next the material of her education, not in words, but in thoughts and the greatest of thoughts. You continually hear that Roman Catholics are not allowed to read the Bible. Here is a little shepherdess who has it in her heart.

Next, the time of her inspiration, at her wedding-feast, as in the beginning of her Master's ministry, at Cana. Here is right honor put upon marriage: and in spite of the efforts made to disturb her household peace, it was entirely blessed to her in her children: not to her alone, but to us and to myriads like us. For her second son Angelo is the original of the four drawings of St. Christopher which illustrates the central poem in Miss Alexander's book, and which are, to the best of my knowledge, the most beautiful renderings of the legend hitherto attained by religious imagination.

Then he suddenly breaks into a fervent religious appeal, using her book as text.

Whether Francesca's book is to be eventually kept together or distributed I do not yet know, but if distributed, the drawings of St. Christopher must remain in Oxford, being, as I have said, the noblest statements I have ever seen of the unchangeable meaning of this ford of ours, for all who pass it honestly and do not contrive false traverse for themselves over a widened Magdalen Bridge. That ford, gentlemen, for ever, know what you may, hope what you may, believe or deny what you may, you have to pass barefoot. For it is a baptism as well as a ford and the waves of it, as the sands, are holy. Your youthful days in this place are to you the dipping of your feet in the brim of the river, which is to be manfully stemmed by you all your days; not drifted with nor toyed upon. Fallen leaves enough it is strewn with, of the flowers of the forest: Moraine enough it bears, of the ruin of the brave. Your task is to cross it: your doom may be to go down with it, to the depths out of which there is no crying. Traverse it, staff in hand, and with loins girded, and with what soever law of Heaven you know, for your light on the other side is the Promised Land, the Land of the Leal.

June 5, 1883, Ruskin went up to London to give a private lecture, chiefly on Miss Alexander's drawings. The talk was at the house of Mrs. W. H. Bishop, in Prince of Wales Terrace, Kensington. There were about two hundred people there, among them Lowell, Matthew Arnold, Leighton, Burne-Jones, and Miss Jean Ingelow. There was also R. H. Hutton, editor of the *Spectator*, who has given an account of the lecture. Ruskin showed about twenty of her drawings, referring to them as

Fine gold which has been strangely trusted to me and which before was a treasure hid in a mountain-field of Tuscany. Since Leonardo da Vinci's flower studies, we can recall no drawings of the herb of the field equal to Francesca's for strength and delicacy, for truth, and the reverence that comes of truth: though she has, perhaps, somewhat to learn in expressing human form. . . . We know no modern drawing comparable to this —

the drawing of the Madonnina visiting, with St. Joseph and the Christ-Child, the gipsy's hut.

As I have said, the book was published in 1885, with so many comments and italics and underscorings by Ruskin that it might almost have been called "Roadside Songs of Ruskin-y"! In the Editor's Preface, Ruskin says:

The book consists of 109 folio leaves, on every one of which there is a drawing, either of figures or flowers or both. To photograph all would, of course, put the publication entirely out of the reach of people of moderate means: while to print at once the text of the songs and music, without illustrations, would have deprived them of what, to my mind, is their necessary interpretation. They would not be, in what is best of them, understood, without the pictures of the people who love them. I have determined, therefore, to photograph, for the present, twenty of the principal illustrations, and to print, together with these, so much of the text as immediately refers to their subjects. . . . They are admirably represented by Mr. Hollyer's photographs. I beg the reader to observe that Miss Alexander's attention is always fixed primarily on expression, and on the accessory circumstances which enforce it, that in order to let the parts of the design on which its sentiment depends be naturally seen and easily felt, she does not allow any artifices of composition or charm of light or shade, which would disturb the simplicity of her appeal to the feelings, and that in this restriction, observed through many years, she has partly lost herself the sense of light and shade, and sees everything in local color only. Other faults there are, of which, however, be they in the reader's estimation few or many, he may be assured that none are of the least weight in comparison with the virtues of the work. And further, that they ought to be all to him inoffensive faults because not caused either by affectation, indolence, or egoism. Miss Alexander's work is sincere and true as the sunshine: industrious with an energy as steady as that by which a plant grows in spring, modest and unselfish, as ever was good servant's work for a beloved Master.

In its relation to former religious art of the same faithfulness, it is distinguished by the faculty and habit of realization which belongs to all Pre-Raphaelitism, whether English or American; that is to say, it represents any imagined events as far as possible in the way it must have happened and as it looked when happening to people who did not then know its Divine import, but with this further distinction from our English school of Pre-Raphaelism, that Miss Alexander represents everything as it would have happened in Tus-

cany to Tuscan peasants, while our English Pre-Raphaelites never had the boldness to conceive Christ or His mother as they would have looked with English faces camping on Hampstead Heath, or confused among a crowd in the Strand, and therefore never brought the vision of them close home to the living English heart as Francesca is able to show the face of her Lord to the hill peasants at the well of l'Abetone. . . . The London artists use . . . for their types of saint or heroine the model who happens that day to be disengaged, or the person in whom they themselves take an admiring and affectionate interest. The first heard organ-grinder of the morning, hastily silenced, is hired for St. Jerome — but Francesca, knowing the histories and versed in the ways of the people round her for many a year, chooses for the type of every person in her imagined picture someone whose circumstances and habitual tone of mind are actually like those related or described in the legend to be illustrated. The servant Saint Zita of Lucca is represented by a perfectly dutiful and happy farm-servant, who has in reality worked all her life without wages; and the gipsy who receives the forlorn Madonna in Egypt, is drawn from a woman of gipsy blood who actually did receive a wounded boy, supposed to be at the point of death, into her house, when all the other women in the village held back: and nursed him and healed him.

This comment of Ruskin's reminds me of Francesca's difficulty in finding models for Incarnate Evil and Incarnate Good, and her final success in delineating both. Signor Zanchetta of Bassano told me how she searched for the first, and I translate his account as he gave it to me:

Once, when Francesca was spending the summer in Bassano, she devoted herself to illustrating the legend of St. Christopher. But when she came to the episode in the saint's life where he meets a mysterious knight, really the devil in disguise, she was at a loss, because she knew of no one who resembled that dreadful being. She appealed to her great friend Cavaliere Bortolo Zanchetta, and he at once set himself to help her. He searched and had others search for the ugliest man in the place, and at last

found him on the Brenta Canal. He brought him to Francesca, who was enthusiastic. She dressed the poor creature in knight's clothing and had him pose for two hours, and again for another two hours after dinner. Her picture of that evil and sinister face is one of the most successful drawings she ever made. The model himself had no idea whom he was representing. When the work was finished, the artist said to Signor Zanchetta, "How should I reward this man's patience? Will thirty lire be enough?"

Signor Zanchetta answered; "Give him five gold Napoleons. We have made the poor fellow enact a terrible character, and we owe him much for that."

So the poor "devil" returned home radiant, as if he had posed for one of the most beautiful of the angels.

As a contrast to this tale, we have Francesca's own account of her vain attempts to paint Christ, when she was illustrating the legend of "Our Lord and the Samaritan Woman." Concerning her difficulties, she writes,¹

The face of our Lord, I need hardly say, was drawn without a model (for where could one find a model for Divinity?) and my own imagination was so altogether indistinct and poor, and yet so much better than my hand could follow, that I passed four days of great distress and anxiety and became almost ill, trying always and failing always. At last this face was the best I could do, and I, anything but contented; but it brought me a great comfort afterwards. . . . After the two figures were both finished, or nearly so, I went out onto a farm where there was a little old well (for there was not room in the picture for a large one), and sat down to draw it. . . . Pretty soon some of the Contadini came up and asked, in a very polite manner, to see what I was doing. One of them was a very sweet-looking, middle-aged woman, with wavy black hair and a pleasant smile in her dark eyes, and she could not see anything but that one face. Then some of the others began to say how beautiful it was, and

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 244.

I said, "Only think what the real face will be, when we see it in Heaven!" Then she spoke, in a low, solemn voice: "I hope we shall all go to Heaven. I do not know whether I shall ever get there, but I hope I shall: it would be very hard to be driven away from the sight of a beautiful face like that." I cannot say how much I was consoled, and yet overpowered, by these words. To think that anything done by my hands should have been used to make that woman desire that Presence more than she did before! I was repaid even though the work had cost me as many years as it had days. And a few days afterwards, when a young Countess, belonging to one of the families most celebrated in Florentine history, was looking over the work (a very pretty young lady she was, and as sweet-looking as the *contadina*. She could not be more so), it seemed to impress her in the same way and she said, "How I wish I could have that face in my room, to look at when I pray!"

Still another experience of hers in finding a model she narrates, very simply, as a probable miracle.¹ Troubled by the serious illness of a baby-friend, Cecchino, and because her drawing of the Suora Marianna would not come right, she had, she says,

gone to sleep with a heavy heart. Then I had a dream, for I thought the little Gesù Bambino came down and stood for me to draw His face. And when I waked, all my confusion had gone away; and since then, I have gone on with my work without any trouble, and do not think any more about who is going to see it or anything else.

Afterwards, I knew that my dear little Cecchino had been taken away a few hours before my dream. I had fallen asleep as I was saying a prayer for him, and he did not need my prayers; but perhaps he may have thought I needed his, who knows? I do not pretend to account for it, but I have told you all just as it happened.

The picture she refers to is "The Watcher at the Pentola," and she tells the story as follows:

The story was of a good Sister who spent her time in nursing the sick; and once, when she had been sitting up for several nights with a poor woman, she was so overcome with weariness that she fell asleep in the chimney-corner.

1. *C.F. in A.*, part VII.

When she awaked, she saw the Gesù Bambino standing by her side, and watching the pentola so that it should not burn. My picture represented the woman asleep, sitting on one of those benches which one often sees in the chimney of old-fashioned Italian houses, and the Bambino, a little child of two years or so, standing at her knee, with one hand extended over the pentola, in the position that I had seen in my dream.

Ruskin adds:¹

Perceiving this to be Miss Alexander's constant method of design, and that therefore the historic candor of the drawings was not less than their religious fervor, I asked her to furnish me with such particulars as she knew of the real lives and characters of the peasants whom she had taken for her principal models. The request was fortunate, since in a very few weeks after it had been presented, Miss Alexander sent me a little white book, stamped with the red Florentine lily, containing in the prettiest conceivable manuscript, a series of biographic sketches. . . . I print them in Francesca's own colloquial terms, as the best interpretation of the legends revived for us by her, in these breathing images of existent human souls.

Elsewhere in his notes to "Roadside Songs of Tuscany," Ruskin says, speaking of two drawings called "Isabella of L'Abetone," and "Lovers' Parting,"²

They are to myself of the most singular interest . . . exactly what I defined . . . in the chapter on *Truth* in "Modern Painters," and pleaded with artists to try for . . . knowing that such art is the best antidote to the fury and vice alike of our withering caricature and sensual imaginings. . . . I am able to speak of the two drawings as faultless because Francesca's carelessness of light and shade enhances, rather than injures, the clear local color and serenity of open air in both of them, and because, while there are often slight errors in gesture or position in her management of groups, the dignity of Isabella's rest, and the firm tenderness of the girl's slight stoop towards her lover are here given with entirely errorless perception and sympathy.

Of the three drawings for the Madonna and the Gipsy, he says,³ "They are to my mind the most joyful because most

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 12.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

credible sacred designs I ever yet saw." He comments on Francesca's drawings of St. Christopher: ¹

I should like the drawing of the appeal of the child on the shore to be compared with the one of the gipsy prophesying, in illustration of Francesca's mysterious power of giving expression by gesture. It has been observed to me more than once that her figures are wanting in general ease of action, and this is true. She seems to have no care, in some sort no power, to give the sway and strength of the moving figure, under ordinary condition of merely physical action: so that when there is no emotion guiding their gesture, her figures are often stiff . . . sometimes ill-drawn. On the other hand, wherever emotion is to be expressed by the turn of the body or position of the hand or foot, her instinct is not only unerring, but fine beyond all fineness hitherto shown in this kind. . . . The expression is given by a subtlety of truth in the lines of gesture which can neither be explained nor imitated . . . its secret is in perfectness of skill guided by purity of sympathy.

Of the utterly simple verse-form of the songs, Ruskin adds ² characteristically that he is thankful that

much as I love my Byron, the lives of Saints may be made vivid enough to me by less vigorous verses than are necessary to adorn the biography of Corsairs and Giaours. . . . There are [he says] ³ twenty versifiers nowadays who can string together any quantity of symphonious twaddle and alliterate whine, for one who can write a rhythmic line in steady English, with some contents of common sense in it.

He exclaims in amazement ⁴ that what he calls

feebly sentimental and idly decorative nonsense collects around the reality of sacred lives, though the real facts are so lovely and significant. . . . It is extremely important to distinguish a saint from an innocent. ⁵ . . . The word saint can only be applied to persons in pure health of body, heart, and brain, and distinctively strong, kind, witty and wise. People so endowed with the unusual virtues of humility, resignation, patience, obedience, fortitude against all temptations of bodily pleasure, and the full-flowing charity which forbids a selfish love become eminent in blessing to the people around them, ministers of vital energy. ⁶

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 312.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 271.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Then ruefully he adds:

It is an extremely hard thing to be a saint! The white robes of daily humanity are always in some way or other a little the worse for wear; and to keep them wholly unspotted from the world and hold the cross in the right hand and the palm in the left, steadily through all the rough walking of it, is granted to very, very few creatures that live by breath and bread! [Yet he continues comfortingly]: The world could no more go on with all its heroes in sack-cloth than with all its mountains in snow: only don't let the glory of the celestial virtue be lost to us because we are not generally expected ourselves to be better than our dogs and horses. My mother would certainly have been a saint but for my father and me!

Mr. Spielman's article comments on her work as follows:

Francesca's power evinces itself in depth and tenderness of feeling and conception and in beauty of execution. Her literary and artistic work, though untutored in the strictly academic sense is, in the highest degree, poetic. It breathes a love of nature that fascinates the beholder and the love of God is the passion in which it has its root. Her aesthetic sense appears to coincide to a singular degree with that of Prof. Ruskin. For though her art is practiced by her primarily for itself, it is to her an expression of praise and charity in the ultimate application of its spiritual force.

When Ruskin said there had been no such drawing since Leonardo, he was roundly laughed at for his extravagance, but if Ruskin's meaning be rightly understood he doubtless referred, not so much to correctness and beauty of outline as to the refinement and exquisiteness of execution, to the tenderness of feeling, to the truth and accuracy of the sentiment and expression it was intended to convey . . . entirely apart from the other merits of color and texture suggestions; and for my part, I can think of no later master who is the equal on all these points of the American amateur in Florence. Barabino's testimony that Miss Alexander could express the soul in the face at which most artists aim but which they almost invariably fail in achieving, will be readily accepted by those who are familiar with the work of this remarkable draughtswoman, and it is possible to understand the enthusiasm of Mr. Watts when he declared to a friend [quoted in Mrs. Russell Barrington's "Reminiscences of Watts"] that he would rather have drawn the face of the "Madonnina" than almost any work he had ever done. But the difficulty of reproducing her work will prevent Miss Francesca Alexander from ever be-

coming a widely popular artist: for no reproductive method, I believe, could do justice to her work, whether photogravure or mixed stipple and line engraving.

Francesca finds it far easier to draw a figure, a face, or a flower than any inanimate object, and not only easier, but better: when she draws a seated contadina, the contadina is always better than the chair she sits on: and a shoe is never rendered so sympathetically nor so perfectly as a foot. . . . Her faults are very obvious, and by some who care for absolute realism, unforgivable. They are the faults proper to the artist of expression who looks more to the soul than the body, and is frankly and by force of circumstances non-academic. . . . In judging of her work, therefore, her critic must accept her as she is, as coming straight from nature: an artist by pure inspiration, without teacher, practically without example. Her other technical fault is her carelessness of, or indifference to chiaroscuro . . . but here again the fault is half a charm. It adds not a little to the archaic beauty and simplicity of compositions which, as a rule, are put together with a grace and felicity that are instinctive. An art so feminine, so delicate, so frank, really gains in its sincerity by its technical faults. But apart from them, when once we have done with her figure-work, and finished studying her astonishing drawing of hair and modelling of flesh, we have nothing but praise for her wonderful foregrounds and her treatment of flowers and all growing things. Here she is in her way supreme. Her methods are her own. She has found the right path for herself and trodden it as a queen, in fullest confidence and in deepest reverence.

All alike agree in marvelling at what Ruskin has called Francesca's "engraver's method." The delicate hatching and cross-hatching, the microscopic fineness of her line, reminds me of the work of the French engraver Gaillard, the artist of "the abnormal eye." I remember his boast to other French engravers, that he could put his burin lines closer together than any one of them had ever done. Accepting his challenge, each tried in turn, but Gaillard, coming last and choosing the plate of his most accomplished rival, placed between that artist's two closest lines seven of his own hair-strokes. The modelling of the face of the

Frate, in the "Sorellaccia" (page 194 of this book), and of his habit reveal the same method with the pen as that used with the tool in Gaillard's "Sister Rosalie" or "Dom Guéranger."

Her work shows never faintest trace of imitation. With free, masterly stroke, and the artless art of pure inspiration, she transfers to her page directly from nature a branch, a spray, a blossom, a delicate feathery grass or a bristling chestnut burr, a dense and close-packed pine-cone, a furry bee or hovering filmy butterfly: no more copying them from other artists than she copies the faces of peasant or other friend drawn by her sure pen.

Of course, the beauty of other artistic work, with which Italy teems, was always shining upon her eagerly receptive spirit, and in the sunshine of that beauty, her special talent flowered and bore fruit, for the sun bursts open all buds alike, but each has color and fragrance of its own. Thus, Francesca was thoroughly familiar with illuminated manuscripts of the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, possessing herself many a page rich with decorative initials and exquisite miniatures of saint or beast or bird or tree, warm with untarnished gold, gentian blue, vivid hibiscus red: pages where the brilliant black and red lettering marches with superb evenness down the old ivory vellum; work done with prayer and offered humbly as the best work of a lifetime to Our Lady and her Divine Son. She may even have seen, in the library of the Papal Palace at Rome, work of those famous old illuminators whom Dante praises, Oderisi of Gubbio and Franco of Bologna, "the eagle excellently done and the very lovely lion breaking a tree," that Vasari admires, in the illuminated missals there. Yet even her "missal writing" is not

like theirs, but steps delicately down the page with a grace peculiarly hers.

A copy of "Roadside Songs of Tuscany" was later sent to her Majesty the Queen of Italy — a beautiful production, the whole, songs, music, and drawings, in facsimile of Francesca's own beautiful handwriting and incredibly fine drawing. Another was presented by Prince Torrigiani, then Sindaco of Florence, to the Palazzo Vecchio.

Beside this most famous book, Francesca also wrote "The Story of Ida," "Christ's Folk in the Apennines," and "Hidden Servants," of which I speak more at length in the next chapter.

CHAPTER X

THE PRECIOUS BOOKS (*continued*)

II. AS FRANCESCA HERSELF REGARDED THEM

THE books Ruskin praises were, of course, the work of many years. In Florence, and also in the mountains where they spent their summers, she had collected stories and legends constantly, tales of beauty, sorrow, courage, faith, illustrating them with her pen-and-ink drawings, the script itself as delicate and lovely as the pictures. Joyously she worked in her little studio, where she received her friends of all degrees. She certainly had the gift of making the Italians she knew *in vena*, or in the mood for telling her curious or characteristic tales.

The Introduction to volume 32 of the Library Edition of Ruskin says:

She had no thought of publishing but she intended to sell the manuscript book ["Roadside Songs"] as she had already sold others of the kind [meaning *The Sorellaccia*] for the benefit of the poor to whom she ministered as friend to friend. The book found many admirers, among others Lord Leighton . . . but its publication was reserved for another admirer, to whom the book, alike in its art and in its words, appealed yet more strongly.

As to their financial value, she had little idea, save the price her father had put on one, the most important.

Her translations of the Songs, and her explanations of the circumstances under which she first heard them, are so humble, so artless, that they remind me of the spirit of Fra Angelico, painting on his knees. Her purpose here, as in all her work, is expressed in her own preface: ¹

1. To *R. S. of T.*

In their day they have been a comfort to many. Labouring people have sung them at their work and have felt their burdens lightened; they have brightened the long winter evenings of the poor women in lonely houses high among the mountains, when they have been sitting over their fires of fir-branches, with their children about them, shut in by the snows outside, and with all their men away in the Maremma; and I have known those who have been helped to bear sickness and trouble, and even to meet death itself, with more courage, by verses of the simple old hymns. It seems to me there are others who will collect and preserve the thoughts of the rich and great; but I have wished to make my book all of poor people's poetry, and who knows but it may contain a word of help or consolation for some poor soul yet?

She says further:

These songs and hymns of the poor people have been collected little by little in the course of a great many years which I have passed in constant intercourse with the Tuscan contadini. . . . These are but the siftings of hundreds and hundreds which I have heard and learned, mostly from old people. Many of them have never, so far as I know, been written down before and others it would be impossible to find. Many were taught me by the celebrated improvisatrice Beatrice Bernardi of Pian degli Ontani, whose portrait I have placed at the beginning of the book, one of the most wonderful women I ever knew.

The tunes, with the exception of those I found printed in the "Corona dei Sacre Canzoni," I learned from the poor people themselves, and wrote them as well as I could. . . . Most of them, though they sound very sweet to me, bringing back the very feeling of the fir woods, on the farms where I have been used to hear them, are nothing more than plaintive monotonous little chants. Accompaniments have been composed by Signora Sestilia Poggiali.

Sometimes she uses verses (like stornelli) from Tigri's "Canti Popolari Toscani," or from "Corona di Sacre Canzone" (some of the latter, she says, might have been written by an Italian George Herbert). Sometimes poems from roughly-printed leaflets sold on the street-corners or on humble street-bookstalls (one or two sold merely for old paper, at so much a pound); oftener, tales handed down orally for centuries and told her, as she says,

by the improvisatrice Beatrice degli Ontani or by Annini Bini ("a beautiful woman and sweet singer of S. Vito, at Bellosguardo"), or by Beatrice and Clorinda Amidei of Faidello or by Faustina Petrucci of San Marcello ("sweetest of all the mountain singers"). "Santa Zita" she translated from Guaspari di Bartolomeo Casenti, of Lucca, 1616. She says his Italian is to good Italian as negro dialect is to good English. "The Madonna and the Rich Man" she heard a blind beggar sing, while his daughter "played on a curious little stringed instrument. I think Beato Angelico painted such an one in the hand of one of his angels." ¹

Not only old legends has she preserved in this book, but many old customs, now passed away, like that of Contadine brides near Florence, in the old days, who wore, she says, ² "a black silk gown with a golden girdle; the hair was dressed in a knot, and covered with a scarlet net, to which was attached a long golden ribbon, falling down on the shoulder; and a pearl necklace and earrings. The Sunday preceding the wedding, the bride was expected to appear at church in a gown of fine woolen, with a silver girdle and ribbon."

In the "Madonna and the Gipsy," the gipsy tells our Lord's fortune, which seems as curious to us as that, in one of Mr. Berenson's pictures, the Bambino should wear a scapula against the Evil Eye.

Another book of hers, "The Story of Ida," the first Ruskin bought, was published anonymously in 1883, with Ruskin's subtitle, "Epitaph on an Etruscan Tomb." It was then that he gave

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 90.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

her the name Francesca (signed to the book). Always before that we find her letters signed "Fanny."

This poignantly told tale, of a gentle, lovely girl who suffered patiently, is, I think, the only one, except "Christ's Folk in the Apennines" and the unpublished "Sorellaccia," which she did in prose. It has a touchingly beautiful frontispiece of Ida asleep, with the sunlight from an unseen window flooding her delicate face on the pillow. This was reproduced by Mr. Rolfe from its own size, three quarters larger.

Francesca says: "From the time I met her until her death, I was almost half the time employed either in drawing or painting her. It was seldom that I could keep any picture of her for more than a little while. Everyone used to ask me where I found such a beautiful face." The profile here reproduced for the first time is owned by Miss Richardson of Florence, who intends giving it to Casa Guidi.

The story was published only because Ruskin wished it: it had been written with no thought of the public. It is full of his characteristic remarks, and has a preface by him, in which he says: "I have long been searching for a writer to record a part of all that was most beautiful, all that was most woeful in the multitude of unshepherded souls in the world. The lives we need to have written for us are of the people whom the world has not thought of, far less heard of, who are yet doing most of its work and of whom we may learn how it can best be done." He adds that this tale of Ida is "absolutely and simply true. I have a certain feeling of desecrating its humility of affection ever since I asked leave to publish it."



IDA ASLEEP

From the pen-and-ink drawing by Francesca, made for her "Story of Ida"

Though in a later letter to Francesca he complained ¹ that the story "was too sad and conceded too much to the modern feeling of the British public that people who are quite good have nothing to do but die," the simple tale has, nevertheless, touched many hearts by its exquisite faith. Old Padre Alishan, at the Armenian Convent near Venice, told Francesca ² that it made him shed many tears, especially remembering his own lovely niece, who resembled Ida in life and in death, and who, he believes, "in Heaven prays more for me than I for her."

Cardinal Manning, who was given a copy of the story by Ruskin, wrote: "It is simply beautiful, like the Fioretti. Such flowers can grow in one soil alone. They can be found only in the Garden of Faith, over which the world of light hangs visibly and is more intensely seen by the poor and pure in heart than by the rich or learned men of culture."

Of course all the proceeds of this, as of all her books, went to charity. In "Christ's Folk in the Apennines," writing to Ruskin of poor petitioners who have just been to see her, she says, ³ "But thanks to you and Ida, I was able to send them away with lighter hearts than they came"; and in another place she says, ⁴ "I gave money to Polissena because it was some of what you gave me for Ida and I thought it was yours and not mine." Again, on the twelfth anniversary of Ida's death, 1885, she writes: ⁵ "Ida's mother has been especially touched and made happy by this money coming from Ida for the poor. 'Only to think,' she says, 'that my Ida should be doing good in the world now, when she died so long ago.'"

1. Preface to *C. F. in A.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

2. *C. F. in A.*, p. 157.
5. *Ibid.*, part VII.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

So of the money won by "Roadside Songs" she writes:¹ "The other thing I want to tell you, because it is a great pleasure among so many that I owe to your kindness, is that my dear Isabella is not going to shovel snow this winter." In the same book, as if Ruskin's praise had given her fame, she adds:² "Since you have bought my book nobody ever advises me at all, except Edwige." On January 22, 1885, she writes again:³ "The 'Roadside Songs' keep having their practical results. A young English girl whom I hardly know at all came in yesterday and asked me if I did not want her to make up a very pretty dress for little Rosa."

Another book of hers which has given great comfort to many is "Hidden Servants." Fortunately, this book is still published, and its sale is constant both here and in England. This was written after her eyes failed her, so it is all in verse and has only one illustration, the picture of Suora Marianna elsewhere referred to.

In the Prelude to this book, she says:

When I was a young girl, many old and curious books fell into my hands and became my favorite reading, next to the Bible and perhaps the Divine Comedy, as I found in them the strong faith and simple modes of thought which were what I liked and wanted. Afterwards, I was always in request with children for telling stories. I always meant to write them down. Finally I thought of turning them into rhyme and learning them all by heart, so that I could write them down little by little. I thought children would not be very particular, if I could just make the dear old stories vivid and comprehensible, which I tried to do. If they may be good for older people as well, then it must be the Lord took from me one faculty to give me another and I think of the Beautiful Italian proverb "When God shuts the door, He opens the window."

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 127.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

3. *C. F. in A.*, part VII.



IDA

*From a pen-and-ink drawing by Francesca,
in the possession of Miss Richardson,
of Florence*

Then, referring to her child-listeners, she writes:

Nothing pleases them so well
As the stories I can tell
From these pages old and gray
With their edges worn away:
Spelling queer and woodcut quaint,
Angel, demon, prince, and saint,
Much alike in face and air,
Houses tipping here and there,
Lion, palm-tree, hermit's cell.

"Good for older people as well," they certainly are, full of comfort, counsel, healing wisdom.

The American edition of "Roadside Songs of Tuscany" is called "Tuscan Songs," and was published by Houghton, Mifflin, and Co. in 1897. Mr. Spielman says:

Partly, perhaps, through difficulties of reproduction, only a section of the work [that which Ruskin bought in 1882] was published; and partly in the belief that he could render the originals more truly useful by distribution, Professor Ruskin did not adhere to his original intention of placing the volume as a whole in the St. George's Museum; and so eventually it came about that Francesca's mother, desirous that her daughter's work should be saved in its complete original form, as far as more modern resources permit, has, with Ruskin's help, and that of Mrs. Severn, traced the whereabouts of all the drawings but two or three, which cannot yet be found.

Mrs. Alexander had no end of people searching for her, chief among them the artist Mr. Edwin Bale and Mr. Marion Spielman. Sometimes they got only a photograph. In the Preface it is said: "A few only of the less important plates are missing and we have found it impossible to trace them. Of three of these, English words are herewith appended." Mr. Spielman goes on: "She had them rephotographed and caused a couple of facsimile

volumes to be executed, in which her daughter's work stands alone, as it was desired to be, without any introduction, or explanatory notes other than its own beauty and its own ineffable grace."

Here, as in "Roadside Songs," all the poems have for their main theme love: sometimes treating of religious love, playfully, tenderly, adoringly as does Fra Jacopone, in his lauds, or that skilled musician St. Francis, in his fervent Hymn to the Sun, man turning to God as flame ascends to its source, or drawn to Him, as Dante says, by the force of spiritual gravity. Sometimes, as in the *rispetti*, the poems are vibrant with human love, sad, vehement, passionate, or full of caressing sweetness, murmuring over and over "amore-amore," as did that earlier Francesca of the Inferno. Italian is the language of love, full of naturalness, rich in words for which often our more reserved English furnishes no adequate equivalent. From Guido Guinicelli, Dante's predecessor, with his "sweet, new style," to the simple, unlettered bards of the people, with their rough, sturdy rhymes, Italy, especially Tuscany, has ever had an abundance of singers; and out of this rich store of song, Francesca drew her material, with rare sympathy and perhaps rarer power to render into English the very aroma of the original, an aroma which so easily evaporates in the average translation. Truly, instead of a name meaning literally "She of France," she should have been called "Italia," for she is *italianissima*, bringing back to those of us who also love Italy haunting echoes and memories.

The stories in another book, "Christ's Folk in the Apennines," Ruskin collected from personal letters to him from Francesca, saying:

It seems to me the best Christian work I can do this year [1880], my own fields of occupation being also in great measure closed to me by the severe warning of recent illness and the languor it has left, will be to gather out of this treasure of letters what part might, with the writer's permission and without pain to any of her loved friends, be laid before those of the English public who have seen enough of the Italian peasantry to recognize the truth of these *ritratti* [or portraits].

April 17, 1887, Cardinal Manning wrote Ruskin: "I am looking forward to your times at Assisi, with S. Francis, and elsewhere with B. Angelico, that is, in the world of 'Christ's Folk' — very beautiful folk and very unlike the influence of the three black R's — Renaissance, Reformation, and Revolution."

Another, smaller book in manuscript by Francesca, several times referred to here, is owned by the Misses Mason of Boston, and contains accounts of the peasants whom she had been able to help, through their generosity. It has many delicately lovely sketches sprinkled through its thin pages.

The "Sorellaccia," or the "Wicked Sister," made before "Roadside Songs," but never published, is owned by the family of Mrs. Quincy Shaw of Boston, for whom it was made in gratitude for money Mrs. Shaw had given Francesca for her poor. It consists of eighty folio pages. The English and Italian, as in "Roadside Songs," are in parallel columns, separated by sprays of wayside flowers, with many full-page illustrations, as well as head- and tail-pieces and decorative initials — altogether a gem worthy of such a jewelled case as guards some of the precious old illuminated Breviaries or Books of Hours. Mrs. Shaw loved the book especially, because in the family of the Sorellaccia are portraits of her own children, between the ages of two and twelve.

After exhibiting it in the Art Museum, she had photogravure copies made of it, page by page, one for each of her five children, and one for the Fine Arts Department of the Boston Public Library.

Francesca's English translation of the story, together with five of her exquisite illustrations, are now reproduced here for the first time, by gracious permission of Mrs. Carteret Fenno, daughter of Mrs. Shaw.

CHAPTER XI

SUNSET AND NIGHT

BUT the glory of the morning, in these lives as in all others, had to fade at last, and the shadows lengthen and the night draw near, though "their years were long in the land the Lord their God had given them."

Mrs. Alexander attained a truly marvellous age, retaining to the last, unimpaired, her extraordinary faculties. In 1892, writing to Mrs. Lawrence, she says that she is reading aloud to Francesca without glasses, and "feels fully able to walk if only she might be allowed." And a letter from Mrs. Lawrence, in 1899, congratulates the mother on reading and writing for Francesca, with good sight and hearing.

When Mrs. Felton returned to Florence, twenty years after her first visit, Mrs. Alexander, at ninety-three, looked just the same and was sewing without glasses. She walked round the piazza every day then, climbed flights of stairs (there was no elevator), had her memory unimpaired, was eager to know about everybody at home, alert, keen.

On April 2, 1914, a newspaper item says that she "celebrated her one-hundredth birthday to-day." It was a great occasion, when she received many letters. She had had quite an ambition to attain that age and used to make people guess how old she was. But when, on this day, Dr. Mille took some photographs of her and she saw them, she said, "These are not like me. I'll show you

a good likeness of me"; and she went and got one of herself at eighteen!

She lived to be one hundred and two. When she died, Francesca said, "I always knew this war would kill her!" This comment made me think of the man in "Christ's Folk in the Apennines,"¹ who remarked of someone who died at seventy-five, "He died so young, poor man! But then, he had worn himself out with the care of the institution and he had had a great deal of trouble." Another Bassano gentleman, in that same book,² who was complaining to Francesca that the health of the city was not what it used to be, said, "At present, among all my acquaintances, I know only one man past one hundred. My father knew several, but now they all seem to drop off between eighty and ninety"; and he shook his head sadly.

Mrs. Alexander had always been afraid of dying. She told me so, adding that she had expressed this fear once to Whittier, who replied, "Then thee has been very wicked?"

"No, I don't think worse than most," she said slowly.

"Then why is thee afraid?" said her gentle Quaker friend.

A friend showed me once a poem Whittier wrote for someone else, with which he might well have comforted Aunt Lucia's shrinking heart:

Unharm'd from change to change we glide,
We fall as in our dreams;
The far-off terror, at our side
A smiling angel seems.
Secure on God's all-tender heart,
Alike rest great and small;
Why fear to lose our little part
When he is pledged for all?

1. Page 85.

2. Page 87.



MRS. FRANK ALEXANDER
ON HER ONE-HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY

From a photograph

She died on May 19, 1916, and when Apprehension opened the door, lo! not Terror, but Love was waiting there. Francesca wrote afterwards: "Mother died like a saint, without pain, going to sleep little by little, with her hand in mine, and she was more beautiful in death than in life. I could not believe for some time that she was dead."

When the end came, Francesca put everybody out of the room, shut the door, and stood by her mother for one whole hour, talking to her steadily in English. This we know only because one of the servants, superstitiously afraid, kept her eye to the keyhole, though of course understanding nothing of what she overheard. Then the daughter kissed her mother's hands and came away. Who knows of what she talked in that last sacred interview? Perhaps she promised all she would do to carry out her mother's wishes and plans. It is not for us to probe into what went on, but we know that afterwards, she said, "Mamma left me a work to accomplish. I am very old and our separation will not be for long" — a phrase she repeated again and again.

Before this death, Francesca had been confined to the house for several years. But she went to the funeral, though she had to be carried downstairs and put into the carriage. She said in one letter: "After this bereavement, I have been ill and much broken down. I continue weak, but I am well, thank God." As a matter of fact, directly she returned, she went to bed, and never again rose from it. She wrote, or dictated, to me, "Here I lie, in my bed, guarded like a treasure."

The severing of so unusually close a bond was really Francesca's *nunc dimittis*, or death-blow. She used to be artlessly

happy, like a child, bound up and satisfied in her mother, her religion, her flowers, her work, and peasants; but later, when she could not work, when so many she loved had died, especially when the Great War brought misery, she grew lonely and a little afraid about her mother, afraid that she could not do for her, or possibly, that she might die first, and she used to beg me rather sadly to pray for her.

Never very strong, in her last years also she had suffered many maladies. First of all, and most serious for an artist, was the almost total blindness which came to her, partly because of the exceedingly fine pen-work she had done for so many years, partly because of the poisonous fumes of a charcoal fire at Bassano. Even in 1885 she speaks of the necessity of sparing her eyes. In 1886, she writes Ruskin: ¹

My eyes have gained wonderfully, so that I am working nearly as well as ever, and they improve every day. Edwige went back to some of the old peoples' science and recommended running water which, she said, in her part of the country was considered a remedy for almost everything. "Only," she said, gravely, "you must have faith. It is necessary to have a little religion for almost everything." So now, wherever we walk, in the country, I run down to every little stream that I see and bathe my eyes in the icy-cold water; and whether it is faith or not, I do not know, but the improvement is very great.

At another time, Dr. Hamilton Osgood of Boston helped her eyes very much for a time, partly by mental or psychic healing.

But the gain was not permanent. In later years, practically all her letters were dictated, both English and Italian. Yet when, in 1893, a friend expressed sorrow that she could no longer use her eyes to draw, Francesca said cheerfully, "Oh, I have done

1. *C. F. in A.*, part VII.

my share: let others do it now." Like St. Francis again, at the end she was nearly blind, but like him, as her earthly sight failed, her spiritual sight and insight grew steadily brighter, till she was worthy to "see the King in His beauty, and the Land which is very far off."

Then there was her lameness, due to a dreadful fall in Basano. Besides, she was the victim of rheumatism. In 1914 she writes of rheumatic attacks which always pulled her down and often kept her in bed. For the last years, she was bent over with rheumatism, wore a heavy woolen shawl and mittens, and her hands were too stiff to knit or sew or draw.

When the World War gripped the whole world, she was utterly unhappy, though as long as her mother lived, she tried to keep up for her sake. Her only violent hatreds had always been war and conscription. Once Mr. Newman was horrified to have Francesca say, when they were discussing the marriage of some girl to a rather gay army officer, "Why, I'd much rather marry a *facchino* [porter] at the station than a military man! Military men terrify me, but the *facchini* are such honest fellows! I have many friends among them."

Mr. Newman protested: "There are also honest fellows in the army"; but she was not persuaded.

In "Ida," speaking of the letters of Ida's soldier-lover, she says quaintly: "Just a little too virtuous, a little too full of sensitive shrinking from other peoples' sins, pathetic lamentation about the wickedness of the Sicilians and paternal advice to Ida, who was so much better than he was. That style may do very well for a clergyman, but I rather mistrust it in a military man."

Once she wrote to Ruskin: ¹

Do you know, Faustina, in "Roadside Songs," is becoming quite a heroine among the Quakers; and it is really a help and comfort to me to know that some people feel as I do about the army and conscription, which are eating the heart out of Italy. The Italians have put me down with lofty talk about "L'Amor della patria," and will not understand that it is just because I do love Italy that I cannot bear to see it so burdened. These good Quakers want me to write something more about it, but I shall not, for I have not the talent sufficient; and if I had, nobody would mind anything I say.

Of this story of Faustina, she added: ²

It is so very sad that I was much inclined to leave it out and should have done so only it is about the conscription — which is the ruin of so many families and which I hate more than I do anything else in the world. People say that I ought not to hate it, that it is a useful and necessary institution; and if I ever begin to say what I think about it, they only laugh at it and have not patience to answer me, nor even to listen to what I say. And because I am tired of being laughed at, I do not talk about it any more; but I should like just once to tell a little, not of what I think but of what I know about it.

In telling the story of Faustina, she says that Faustina's lover drew an unlucky number in the conscription, and adds: "Oh, how thankful poor mothers and fathers are sometimes to think that their sons are lame or blind of an eye, or have any defect or infirmity that may incapacitate them for military service."

She frequently mentions wars and her horror of them, in her books; in the "Story of Ida" she says: "The Italian army was then preparing to march on Rome [about 1870] and we were all fearing a great battle, which really never came. We were all preparing lint and bandages, thinking they would be wanted as on former occasions, and my mother gave out work of this sort to all whom she could find to do it."

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 27.

2. *R. S. of T.*, p. 230.

And again in that same book, she records that "Ida's lover was ordered to Sicily to fight the brigands."

Of course she tried to help, in the colossal calamity which came to darken her last years. Francesca and her mother each gave a bed to the Red Cross at a hospital, or *posto di rifugio*, near the Front — Villa Trento, near Udine, headquarters of Unit 1 of the British Red Cross in Italy. These are mentioned in E. V. Lucas's book on the war in Italy, — *Outposts of Mercy*, — and there's a picture of the very corner where those two beds were.

But she was troubled beyond measure as her friends were drafted, one after the other. In 1916 she wrote me, "the lawyer Lefons has been taken in the army draft"; and later that same year, she wrote: "Dr. Pasquale Lefons has returned to his own country and his brother the lawyer has been taken by the army draft and besides, is ill." Another letter says: "Little Sandrina, granddaughter of Edwige, whose picture I drew for Professor Stoddard 28 years ago [this picture I have now], has married a chauffeur of Prince Gabitzzone, but he has been called to the war in the corps of automobile drivers, leaving his wife and three lovely children: the Prince meanwhile is supporting the family: I seem to live in a ruined world." And again, "Those of my few friends who could escape from Florence have gone away. The city is a city of hospitals and a refuge for the wounded and sick."

A letter from Francesca to Miss Richardson, during the war, says:

I have so much to thank you for that I do not know where to begin. Your delightful letter and the lovely daffodils that have been lighting up my room like sunshine and those four most beautiful verses which I am trying to learn by heart, of the four seasons, wonderful pieces of word-painting, bringing back

to me things and places that I loved long ago. [I think they were about Vermont.] But most of all I thank you for the true friendship that is behind it all. Your account of your Tuesday teaparty is a real delight and you make it so vivid that I feel as if I had been present and had seen the snowdrops and rosebuds on the table and your grandmother's china and the pleasant view from the window and the happy smile on the faces of those who forget, for a while, their sad thoughts [of war].

Before her mother's death, in 1916, she wrote: "My poor Mama has gone far down in health; between anxiety about the war and the great troubles of beautiful Italy and of the many families dear to us, she needs me constantly at her bedside; and besides, there weigh on me the thoughts of the house and of many other people. I am tired and discouraged."

Later, she wrote: "What terrible days these are for all the world! I thank God Mama has returned to Him and does not see our miseries."

It was not long after this that she wrote patiently: "I have been getting worse and for some time have not been well. But — though not yet well, I am better."

But as she had known herself, the separation from the mother she had worshipped was "not for long." January 21, 1917, hardly a year and a half after that parting, Francesca slipped quietly out of the "changed world" of to-day. The night before she died, says Clementina, "she humbly begged my pardon! 'For what?' I asked, amazed. 'Because once I gave confusing directions so that you had to wait in one station while we went from another; you had no money and were worried. It was my fault. Forgive me!'"

Clementina and Cecilia, who were with her at the end, say she died like a saint, without uttering a single complaint or show-



FRANCESCA AT EIGHTY

From a photograph

ing any suffering. Her last words were, "Pray, pray, that God may receive me into His Grace." The murmur ceased and she fell asleep like a little child, just stopped breathing with no struggle. Surely for her could be used the same words that are carved on "Ida's" grave at Trespiano: "Fell asleep in the peace of God."

On the day of her funeral, the snow was very deep and the wind icy, so few came, only about three friends beside the servants. Mr. Blake read Lowell's Sonnet, written for her, and Mr. Pult offered the prayers, in the little chapel of the Allori Cemetery.

On a memorial card, sent out by her devoted friends, Countess Silvia Baroni Pasolini and the Zanchetta family, all of Bassano, is written of her:

"Nell' ombra silenziosa d'una stanza romita, fra le memorie pie che furono il sorriso della candida anima, fra le cure pietose che agli amici e ai poveretti diedero amore di sorella, carità d'angelo, tra i fiori che dissero all dolce pellegrina della lontana sua terra natale il divino incanto della nuova patria idolatrata l'Italia,

"Francesca Alexander sola col suo Dio serenamente s'addormì. Dove la sua eterea figura di santa passò, fu bellezza, carità, benedizione; Non piangiamo per lei, ma preghiamo perché a noi venga la forza del suo spirito, la luce, che a lei arrise, della Pace Divina.

"Bassano, 28 Gennaio, 1917." ¹

1. In the quiet shadows of a solitary room, amid the holy memories which made glad her pure heart, and the tender charity which she lavished on her friends and on the poor, like a sister or an angel, and the flowers which breathed to this sweet pilgrim, far from her native land, the divine enchantment of her new and idolized country, Italy, Francesca Alexander fell asleep, alone with her God. Wherever she passed, delicate, holy, there was beauty, charity, blessing. We do not weep for her, but we pray that to us may come the strength of her spirit, the light which shone on her of the peace of God.

PART II

PILGRIMAGE IN FRANCESCA'S FOOTSTEPS

CHAPTER XII

A LITTLE AMETHYST RING

I HAVE a tiny ring, set with a small amethyst, not valuable in the eyes of any jeweller, but dear to me. For one of my very first memories is of snapping open the little worn leather case and seeing it lie on the faded velvet inside, and of repeating, with always the same romantic thrill, "Francesca's mother gave me that when I was a little child in Italy." Even now it helps me to "dream true," like Peter Ibbetson — to dream back to the vanished days of youth once more.

Nearly everybody has some relative around whom his dreams may focus, an uncle in India, for instance, who sent home the ivory elephants or teakwood tables, the rugs or fragrant cedarwood fans in the drawing-room. My prized ones were Great-Aunt Lucia and "Great-Cousin" Francesca, who had lived in Italy so long that they spoke Italian (I used to think vaguely that they had probably forgotten their English by this time), and whom John Ruskin loved.

Though I left Florence when I was four, and did not return for years, I begged my parents so often to tell me of my babyhood there that it seems to me I remember it all myself. Indeed, when I did return, I was afraid to say how familiar Florence seemed to me, lest people should think me romancing: Casa Guidi, 9 Piazza San Felice, where we lived on the top floor; the Boboli Gardens, where my brother and I played, watching the fountains, rolling hoops, or searching in low trees for the candy-

eggs my father had hidden for us to find. The very smell of the polenta-dolce I recognized once, years later, as it came up through a grating in the Italian quarter of Boston, though I had not smelt it since those old Florentine baby-days.

But more vivid than all the rest are the memories of Francesca and her mother, even their dress: the mother with her lace-cap, like those in Holland, pinned on each side with old silver peasant-pins; sometimes with a little black velvet jacket, with loose sleeves, worn over a white, finely pleated blouse. She cared for dress, I know now, and got all her clothes from Paris. Francesca, on the other hand, was utterly indifferent to dress. Witness a whole box or hamper, once stored in the cellar of the Bonciani, full of various kinds of stays, with which the mother had tried, from time to time, to improve Francesca's figure; but of course the daughter never wore them. She had her black hair gathered loosely into a chenille net behind. Her dress, in the fashion of years before, when they left America, was plain as a peasant's, with a very full skirt, a jacket or blouse, shoes with prunella-sides.

My little brother and I saw Francesca working in her tiny room at the top of the house, and she often showed us her flowers on the wee terrace, growing in terra-cotta pots. Sometimes she sketched us, as we sat listening, entranced, to her fairy tales. I seem to remember just how she looked then, rather small, with a very round face and dark eyes. She was not handsome: indeed, even Ruskin confessed to Mrs. Newman that he did not like to look at her, much as he loved her, because she was so plain. The pictures of her as a tiny child are dear, with her big, innocent eyes

full of dreams; and the painting as a prim little girl in a lace collar is sweet too. But the portrait at seventeen, in the round bonnet with the veil thrown back, is not pretty. As one friend wrote after her death, "Her exquisite soul was always most unworthily housed."

Be all my impressions actual memories or hearsay, at any rate, my images of her and of her mother tallied exactly with what I saw when I grew up and returned to Italy, first for a year, and ever since, for frequent sojourns, short and long.

On all my visits, I went constantly to see the Alexanders, going at the strange hours they preferred. Sometimes they asked me to come to dinner at five, or to call at one, even in summer, on a day so hot that I clung to the strip of shadow under loggia or awning till I came to Piazza Santa Maria Novella, then crossed swiftly as a lizard the white-hot square (which even the coachmen deserted, dozing on their boxes at any corner where there was shadow, while the horses also took a siesta, with hanging heads and dangling, empty nose-bags). As I reached the entrance to No. 21, with its iron grill, I would ring and listen to the echoes of the bell up the hollow stairway, till I heard the footsteps of old Raffaello, the porter, approaching. He would unlock the gate with a huge key, letting me into the hall, which seemed a deep cave of coolness, like the Duomo when you have slipped past the heavy, padded curtain at the main door. Slowly he would precede me up the two flights of marble stairs to the Alexanders' drawing-room. There he would announce, with a bow and a flourish, "*La sua cugina*" (your cousin), and withdraw to get me an ice, or, in later winter visits, a cup of black coffee. I never went there without being given one or the other.

CHAPTER XIII

FLORENCE

JUST to follow Francesca's dear footsteps, I went to Italy again in the summer of 1923, as a pilgrim journeying to every spot she loved; and this pilgrimage made me understand her as I never had before, so that now I linger over her books with an odd sense of intimacy and knowledge. Many of her friends are now my friends, and the tales they told her seem to have been told to me too. It was as if from a window I had seen her there.

Sabatier, in the preface of one of the many books he has written on St. Francis, says:

No one can hope to know St. Francis without knowing and loving the places where he lived. And here it is not a question of geographical or external knowledge, but of something more intimate and vital. . . . It is not only because the eyes of St. Francis rested . . . on these hills which the setting sun leaves so reluctantly that we want to see them and feel their spirit. It is because, as we look on them in the light of his temperament, a faculty far transcending our intellect comes to birth within us, and if we could follow it to the end, there would spring up in us a sincere desire of fellow-service.

I chose as the Tabard Inn of my pilgrimage a place where I had once been very happy, the Canonica of the village priest in Desiderio's birthplace, Settignano, just above Florence, a place such as Francesca would have loved well. This priest's house is so close to the little church as to be literally built into it, so that from windows cut in the party-wall I have often heard Mass and watched Misericordia funerals. Like the two buildings, the

lives lived here, religious and secular, are built into each other. Both grew slowly dear to me, till I felt as much at home as one of the doves, preening its feathers on the sunny tiles. I came to love the household of nondescript servants, like old toothless mastiffs, who wandered sociably in and out of the dining-room at meal-times, unconscious as those doves, which often waddled in too. I loved, too, the ceremonies of the changing year. Sometimes it was a baptism, the old Priore tenderly taking the little bundle from its nurse, carefully dipping the water to cross its wrinkled forehead, and then, when all was done and the angels given charge over it, like a mother, wiping its little bald head, perhaps dusting it with a powder-puff, and then tying on its cap again. Occasionally, when one of the music-loving Franciscans came up to preach a mission, he would get the short-breathed cook to blow the organ for him puffily, and would take great delight in the resulting jerky melodies, Gregorian chants which hardly recognized themselves with such innocently altered tempo. Often during the winter I spent there, as I sat reading, by the luxury (rare in Italy) of an open fire, the cook, who was also Sacristan, came in and took a coal from the hearth to kindle the censer.

It was wonderful to live in the thrilling circle of the church-bells. One rang constantly, for baptisms, marriages, funerals, unfolding to our ears the panorama of life. The biggest bell had a mellow hum or drone — in the drowsy air of summer, a velvety burr. When a baby died, the smallest bell rang a merry carillon, for joy that the little white soul had passed, with no Purgatory between, straight to Paradise. Hour in, hour out, they rang, so

that the doves wheeled and lighted, unscared by the familiar clamor.

So familiar did I become with the priest's round of duties in his parish far-flung over the hills; with hearing the night-calls from sick and dying, and his immediate starting out with the Blessed Sacrament, Domenico, that versatile cook, helping to hold the canopy over him: with seeing the *Misericordia Trasporto*, or funeral procession, to the Campo Santo, preceded often by a band playing haunting dirges, with syncopated rhythm, which echoed back from the high stuccoed walls on each side of the street. From these expeditions the Priore always returned late, for these mountain brothers-of-pity were all laborers and must needs serve God when their service for an earthly master was done. Often, as I stood and watched them disappear, I've seen the evening star, unnaturally brilliant, shine steadily against the warm afterglow. The priest's eyes, when he came home, would be heavily ringed with torch-smoke and his boots crusted with mud or white with dust.

In this hill-village, old godly customs clothe labor with simple reverence, making of times and seasons a holy calendar, wherein, now and then, mingle without discord, Christian and ancient pagan custom — as when, on Shrove Tuesday, confessions go on all day in church, while, outside, in the fields, old women and children, in a furtive sort of way, carry little lights, trying to make them shine on every part of the fields; the old "imitative magic," suggestion to the sun of his expected bounty; or when, on Good Friday, the figure of the Dead Christ is laid tenderly in the Sepulchre, among curiously pale white flowers, especially

grown for the purpose in a cellar, the very same kind with which, centuries ago, women filled the tomb of the dead Adonis.

Behind the house is a sweet mossy old garden, peopled with cooing pigeons and thrifty bees, with great terra-cotta pots or *conca* of lemons, heavily fragrant in the starlight; roses covering the pergola in profusion, their sweetness now and then mingled with a little cloud of aromatic incense, drifting out from the open sacristy window, over by the stone tanks where the women wash. There, too, are pale yellow iris, hovered over by white butterflies, and swift lizards darting across the path, all like friends. Once I stopped, in a stroll, to admire a tulip, and the old gardener said, "Oh, look at my best ones over there. These are ugly."

"Speak low," I warned, "these will hear you and be hurt."

Whereat he laughed: "Oh, no, Signorina, their ears aren't out of the ground yet."

Farthest from the house, I looked over the low boundary wall, across feathery-gray olives, to distant Florence, swimming in a golden haze, poignantly lovely as the sun touched with a heavenly radiance Giotto's springing lily of a Campanile and Brunelleschi's brown bubble of a dome. Between, the great Arno coils and winds along the plain in glistening, silvery loops, and far to the right rises the Hill of the Incontro, where St. Francis and St. Dominic met, with the brotherly embrace that Andrea Della Robbia has made famous.

This time I found changes, of course, even in the Canonica, as everywhere in Italy. One tiny chapel of the church had been turned into a memorial for the village lads who fell in the Great War. The Prior's tonsure had widened visibly. Maria's boy, then

a fosterling away in the hills, was grown now, with a Fascisti mop of hair. But I soon settled into the old pleasant, casual routine of days and ways once more.

From this peaceful hilltop, I descended almost daily, by the squeaky tram (whose brakes, I am sure, had not been oiled since I was last there), to Florence and twice to places farther afield, on my quest of memories of Francesca. Of course it was hot, intensely hot. The buzz-saw of the cicala pierced my ears, and in the tram the fans fluttered like nervous butterflies. But by imitating the wise lizard and clinging to the narrow strip of shade under high walls or awnings, I managed fairly well.

One of these days I went to her tiny church, 17 Via della Vigna Vecchia, beside the Bargello. It is called Chiesa Cristiana Evangelica and is the church of the Fratelli, corresponding to the Plymouth Brethren. Here men with eager, visionary faces gather as simply as the fisherfolk of Galilee to talk with God. Though it is the oldest Protestant church in Italy, it is a very humble, absolutely simple little church, or rather chapel. The founders had become so tired of all elaborate ritual that they veered to the other extreme. They have one very plain little room, with long gray linen curtains, wooden benches, a reading-desk, and a melodeon. There is no choir, but the little congregation sings the sweet old hymns my mother taught me, in my Florentine childhood.

Just before leaving America at fifteen, Francesca joined Park Street Church, Boston, and rather wonderful though it seems, was, to the day of her death, though so closely in sympathy with the Catholic peasantry of Italy, a Lutheran. Ruskin, in the pref-

ace to the "Story of Ida" says: "Let it be noted with thankful reverence that this is the story of a Catholic girl, written by a Protestant one, yet the two of them so united in the truth of the Christian faith and in the joy of its love that they are absolutely unconscious of any difference in the forms or letter of their religions."

Francesca wrote to Ruskin:¹

I wonder why so many ministers always preach as if they were reciting a lesson? My old minister never behaved in that way. He talked in a natural voice, as if he believed what he was saying, and he preached grand sermons. Once, he preached one that was a great deal too grand and made us feel as if we were not listening to a mortal man. I shall never forget that sermon.

This preacher was Signor Teoderico Pietrocola Rossetti (cousin of the poet), "and curiously enough, directly after preaching that sermon [on the text, 'In my Father's House are many mansions'] he died." Signor Rossetti was the one who so comforted Mrs. Alexander, as Francesca adds here, "in her great affliction [that is, at the death of her husband], saying those words that she has quoted to me one hundred times since, 'There is no use in anyone's trying to obtain consolation for himself. Consolation is the gift of God and one must pray for it, as for any other blessing.'"

Now the pastor is Signor Pult, a devout Swiss, born and brought up in Italy. The day I was there, he preached fervently, gave an extemporaneous prayer, read letters from absent members of the congregation, and then, to my great embarrassment, told the people that on "the back bench is sitting the cousin of our dear Sister Francesca Alexander."

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 326.

Every Sunday morning they "break bread together" (the bread is carried around in baskets to the people and wine in a goblet). Signor Pult said to me: "We refuse it to no one who is a Christian, because it is not our table, but the Lord's." Francesca used to break bread with them as long as she was able to go out. So did her friends Lord Radstock and Count Guicciardini, drawn, like the poor people of whom the congregation is chiefly composed, by the absolute sincerity one feels there instantly.

After Francesca could no longer go to church, the clergy there used to go and sit with her for hours, reading the Bible to her, and during that time she saw no one else. Another clergyman who also visited her often, in those last shut-in years, was Mr. Blake, of the Scotch Presbyterian Church. He told me that always, when he rose to go, she put out her hand to indicate that she wanted him to pray with her. He soon found that, when he thanked God for His mercies, she was pleased, but when he emphasized men's sins, she ceased to listen. Her comfort was not God the Judge, but God the Father, eager to pardon. In her lovely tale in "Hidden Servants," she says that one little handkerchief soaked with the "tears of repentance" outweighed the heaped-up sins of a lifetime.

I think I never knew anyone whose religion was so much a natural part of life. She lived by prayer, and like "Brother Lawrence," constantly "practised the presence of God." I always love to read of the time when "Ida prayed for the soul of an evil old woman, about to die unrepentant, and Ruskin, in a footnote, asked peevishly, 'Why should one wicked old woman be prayed for more than another? Why did n't she pray for the King of

Italy?' And Francesca answered patiently, 'I never felt poor Ida's prayer could have been altogether wasted.'"

Her faith was always childlike, as we see by her letters, the type of legends she liked, and her last words before she died. Like her own description of St. Catherine of Siena, "Her soul was with the angels while her feet were on the ground." And she was like her "Polissena" too, of whom she wrote Ruskin:¹ "You remember that our Lord spoke of certain people whom He would make His abode with? Well, sometimes I think perhaps she is one of those and that He is always with her. She seems like it."

She was always reading her little Testament — the New. I don't think she cared for the Old, with its terrible visitation of wrath on the third and fourth generations!

Not only did she read from the Testament to her peasant friends, but she also gave copies to all who could read for themselves — to Angelica, to Rosita, to Faustina, and others. I remember her description of that last Christmas at Ida's, when she read St. Luke's Story of the Nativity and recited the old Christmas hymn, "Mira, cuor mio durissimo." She says that Ida's favorites were the Epistles of St. Paul, "because they expressed our utter helplessness and the perfect sufficiency of the Saviour."

So eager was she to have others read the Bible that she coaxed them by saying it was "si divertente"!² Indeed the real reason for their leaving Bellosguardo and, later, Abetone, was that the local priests objected to her missionary efforts and made things a bit unpleasant for her at the end.

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 23.

2. So diverting.

Her feeling toward God was a mixture of confident, childlike love and deep reverence. She thanked Ruskin ¹ "for putting it into my head to draw those pictures of saints — it is the pleasantest work that ever I did and keeps me always in good company." Hers was not so much a religion of mysticism as her native air, in which "she lived and moved and had her being."

Bellosguardo

Another day, going out from the crumbling Porta Romana to the Roman Road, then down the Viale for a way, skirting the old Roman walls, I turned finally to the left, and climbed up to Bellosguardo, that hill of "fair and pleasant prospect." On the way I passed the little church of San Francesco, where the Alexanders so often went, and its little piazza, where Edwige's five children waited for her return, a pathetic little group in the moonlight. In those days, the only houses there were those of contadini, but now there are villas all along. At the very top of the hill, with only one villa higher (the "Ombrellino," so called from the little iron parasol shading a garden-seat there), I found No. 10, the Villa "Brecchieri-Colombi," where the Alexanders lived so happily for many years. The villa is to let now, and the present owner, Marchese Luigi Brecchieri-Colombi, was away. But presently my ring at the gate was answered by a caretaker, who led me up the avenue, bordered by a privet-hedge, to the terrace, with its cypresses. "I came," said I, "because a dear cousin of mine once lived here."

"Oh, yes," she interrupted quickly, "there's an inscription to her on the wall"; and she led me triumphantly to a tablet, on

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 62.

which was the lovely description, from "Aurora Leigh," of the enchanting view:

I found a house at Florence, on the hill
Of Bellosguardo. 'Tis a town which keeps
A post of double observation o'er
The valley of Arno (holding as a hand
That outspread city) straight towards Fiesole,
And Mount Morello and the setting sun —
The Vallombrosan Mountains opposite,
Which sunrise fills as full as crystal cups
Turned red to the brim because their wine is red;
No sun could die nor yet be born unseen
By dwellers at my villa.

To this villa Aurora came with rescued Marian, from England,
and here blind Romney found her and won her at last. The description in the poem goes on like this,

. . . . From the outer wall
Of the garden dropped the mystic floating grey
Of olive-trees (with interruptions green
From maize and vine) until 'twas caught and torn
On that abrupt black line of cypresses
Which signed the way to Florence. Beautiful
The city lay along the ample vale,
Cathedral, tower and palace, piazza and street:
The river trailing like a silver cord
Through all, and curling loosely, both before
And after, over the whole stretch of land
Sown whitely up and down its opposite slopes
With farms and villas.

Constance Fenimore Woolson lived here for some years, and here she entertained Henry James for three summers. Gilbert Osmond's villa, in "The Portrait of a Lady," is modelled on l'Ombrellino," where James began the novel in the spring of 1879.

CHAPTER XIV

ABETONE

LATER I motored to Abetone, one of the places she loved well, famous for the purity of the Tuscan tongue spoken there. It is the highest point in the "wind-grieved" Apennines, and is between Pistoia and Modena, on the border where Lombardy and Tuscany meet. Francesca writes Ruskin often of the "mortal dislike between the Tuscans and Modenese here, almost like the old Scottish border-warfare,"¹ and adds that people living not a mile apart speak of each other as foreigners. "The Mountain people," she says, "have a great faculty for glorifying their own particular little corners, however small, and despising the rest of the world, which the Italians call 'the patriotism of the Campanile'"; and she tells him laughingly of a peasant who brought her a trout caught in the river Lima and remarked that "we should find it quite different from the trout caught in the Sestaione," four miles away! The fine government road goes from Pistoia to Modena and passes Abetone at its highest point.

Up and up we wound, first through great forests of chestnuts (giving to the region the name "Castania"), for luckily, there is no chestnut-blight here. Every now and then we saw the *secatoios*, where in the fall the chestnuts are dried for two months. Then they are husked by the simple process of a man's jumping on them with hob-nailed shoes; then they are ground into the meal from which is made the *polenta dolce*, staff of life to the

1. *R. S. of T.*, pp. 19, 20.

peasants. Here, too, is made much charcoal, so universally used for scaldinos, censers, etc., as well as for the daily cooking. The air, as we climbed, was often full of the faint fumes of its burning. Sometimes we passed charcoal-burners, with blackened faces, leading one or two mules, laden with bags of charcoal.

Higher up were the *abete*, or hemlocks, from which the place gets its name. Occasionally there was a cherry-tree, the only fruit which will grow at this height. In Francesca's time, all these trees belonged to the Royal domain, and no tree could be cut or trimmed without government supervision.

The road was excellent, though steep enough to make our engine purr as it climbed. (Francesca says that "a plain in that part of the country means only a piece of ground where anyone can walk without extreme danger of falling off.) There were occasional stone bridges, and everywhere we looked out on a splendid prospect, more and more glorious, the higher we got — the mountains and forests and valleys which Francesca so loved and so constantly drew in all her books. In the days before the automobiles (and perhaps still, for heavy wagons) Francesca tells us that ¹

there were men who went "trapelo," that is, lived at Ponte a Cutigliano, just at the foot of the steepest ascent to Abetone, and kept one or two strong horses, which could be fastened to any wagon or carriage, in front of whatever horses there might be already, and would help drag it to the highest part of the road: the owner walking beside them all the way.

How well I remember the days of horse-cars in America, when a steep hill was climbed in the same way!

Here Francesca and her people spent sixteen or seventeen

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 5.

summers very happily, before Abetone took the place of Vallombrosa as a fashionable summer resort. She writes Ruskin: ¹

When we first began to go to Abetone, no other stranger went there and then it was a wild and primitive place enough. One would hardly call it even a village — a little country church, the priest's house, a small tavern, a great barn built to receive the hay from the government fields (for Abetone is a part of the royal possessions) and the old custom house (no longer used since Tuscany and Modena ceased to be separate states); all built in plain, massive style, with small square windows cased in heavy, roughly cut stone, and all built on a slope so steep that every house was a story higher on one side than on the other. A little farther down the road, across a bridge, was one small house, and that was all: no other roof in sight, though we had a wide prospect enough of fir woods and desolate, though beautiful, mountain-tops. We ourselves occupied all the available rooms in the tavern, except one which was kept for the use of any stray traveller.

Simple though it is still, it must have been far more primitive then, when she records: ² "Some women of the region wore clothes from the wool of their own sheep, linen from other farms which raised flax, and a head-handkerchief which they had purchased with their own beautiful hair."

The father was with them all the first summers at Abetone, and shared in all the simple joys, simple as those of Cranford. He and Francesca climbed the hills together, the mother, as usual, preferring to drive on the roads. Mrs. Alexander wrote Ruskin: ³ "Mr. Alexander has amused himself, helped by all the boys of Abetone, in making a wall of earth, covered with turf full of flowers, where the water runs from the brim of the basin: so it has made a transparent little lake, a few inches deep." And again, she writes: ⁴ "We have a tame canary here — which Mr. Alex-

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 151.

3. *C. F. in A.*, p. 66.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

ander found at Bellosguardo: it had dropped into the road from a nest above a high wall: he brought it home and we brought it up." Another very Cranford-y tale of those days is given by Francesca, in another Ruskin letter:¹ she writes of "a cow we used to know, when we first began to go to Abetone. She was rather a remarkable character. The girl who tended them treated them with the most deferential politeness and gave poetic names to them. Cows have their sympathies, like the rest of us, and for some reason best known to herself, Argentina saw fit to attach herself to me. She would come behind me, bend her beautiful head till it rested on my shoulder, and watch with much apparent interest the progress of my work."

In Mrs. Mason's book she records:

Papa and I, with the landlord's little boy as guide, set out to pay a visit to Caterina (who had been carried to the remote glen where she lives). I have not time now to describe our long and difficult walk, though I should like to, for it took me through as beautiful and strange a country as I had ever seen — but when we reached the top of a very steep green hill, we found ourselves looking down into a narrow, secluded ravine, on the other side of which was the magnificent mountain Cimone, highest of the Tuscan Apennines. Our grand old Cimone is only half Tuscan after all and we were on the Modenese side at that moment. At the bottom of the ravine, directly at our feet, were two little houses, crowded close together — both of dark stone, roofed with slate, and they had very large chimneys and little windows. Near them were two or three cherry trees and a very small patch of corn. With much difficulty we descended the side of the ravine, and on reaching the bottom found ourselves in the midst of a large number of barefooted children, with bright eyes and tangled hair, who escorted us in silence to one of the doors, staring solemnly all the time. We entered a low and dimly-lighted kitchen. It was very smoky and the great beams overhead had been smoked for so many years that they had become quite black, and yet the smoke had plenty of room to escape, for

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 63.

the chimney occupied nearly one side of the room. Caterina seated herself in a queer old chair and made me sit by her side. Meanwhile the room filled up. All the inhabitants of the other house came in to see the strangers and to ask questions. After a few moments, Caterina's mother appeared, a handsome, noisy, good-humored savage, with brilliant eyes and teeth, in an old red bodice and striped petticoat. This wild, vigorous, not unpleasing woman divided most of the time while we were there between urging us to partake of milk and cheese, and making vain efforts to drive out a hen with a large brood of chickens. The good lady apparently wished to keep up the polite fiction that they did not live in the house, but had entered by accident; and the poor hen screamed angrily and flew up on the table and ran under the chairs and caused a great commotion in the thick blue smoke, where one pale streak of light from the window rendered it visible; and had evidently no idea what her mistress wanted.

Again, about 1866, she writes Mrs. Mason of a poor man she found exhausted by the roadside, and says, "We hired a lodging for him and Mr. Alexander brought him enough to eat and drink." It was that same summer of 1866 that she saved a poor girl named Clorinda Santi, at the point of death from a terrible fright she had had, and Francesca adds to the letter in which she records this. "Fanny thinks it may be why circumstances apparently accidental induced us to come to Abetone this summer, which we had not intended to do."

Evidently Mr. Alexander was as popular as his wife and daughter, for she writes Mrs. Mason: "Sandra's last child was a daughter, which was rather a disappointment to her, as she hoped she should have a son, that she might name him 'Francesco' for Mr. Alexander. She already had one daughter named Francesca, but she was so determined this one should be Mr. Alexander's namesake that she had her christened Francesca also." (Of course, the writer of the letter was not called Fran-

cesca then.) She goes on: "We asked if it did not make some confusion. 'No,' she said, 'we call her Ceccha and the other Cecchina and we have got used to it.'"

Once Francesca and her mother were away from Abetone for five or six years, and returned in 1883 to find great changes,¹ "none of them to my mind for the better, the beautiful remote place gradually becoming better-known and growing into a fashionable summer resort; now hotels in process of building; the grand old forest, which gives the district its name of 'Bosco Lungo' being slowly cut away; the people becoming poorer and more discouraged." She and her mother had nothing to do with these gay newcomers, but chose times for their walks when others were not in evidence. Very early in the morning before others were astir, they went up to the top of the pass, accompanied by Edwige, and so avoided the strangers. Francesca used often to stay up on the mountain-side to draw, while her mother returned to her room, to sew or knit for the peasants; then they walked up there again in the evenings, when hotel guests were at dinner.

For a while, as we rode up on our pilgrimage, I tried to jot down the names of the wee settlements we passed — Rivorete in the valley; Il Bicchieri (or the goblet), so called because there used to be just one inn there and one glass; Ceccette, where Francesca often went for a walk; Bosco Lungo; Faidelle (said to have been settled by gipsies); Fonte alla Vaccaja (with just two houses); and so on, almost every spot associated in some way or other with Francesca, who loved them all. But I gave up in despair when I found that by every spring was a house or two, and each of these clusters of life had a name of its own.

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 156.

We reached the top, Abetone, as the darkness was falling, and found, to our dismay, that every room was taken, for it was the height of the season. I had been feeling rather blue before, remembering that I had no clue, beyond Francesca's own books, to guide me to the house she occupied, and anyway, after so many years, everything would be changed. Now my heart sank and I felt like a needle in a haystack with no one looking for me. There was no help for it: supper and a bed must be sought elsewhere; so rather low-spiritedly, we descended to Piansenatico, four miles lower down. Here we told our plight, and a kindly woman took us in, I'm afraid at the cost of sleeping herself, with all her family, in the dining-room.

Next morning, I came down to breakfast before my friends and had an adventure which seems to me so wonderful as to be breath-taking — so wonderful that I shall always feel that Francesca herself helped me. As the pretty daughter of the house brought my coffee, I said to her, merely on the off-chance, "Did your mother ever know the Alexanders, Americans who were here many years ago?"

"I'll ask Mama," she said; and after a brief confab, Mama herself appeared. "I knew them well, when I was a tiny girl," she said gently, "I used to pick flowers for Signorina Francesca. But across the street lives Faustina Petrucci, who is older than I and who was their friend. She is old now, but she can tell you everything." She proved to be *the* Faustina, of the "Roadside Songs"! Breathless at my good fortune, I lost no time in seeking her out, wondering how I could have forgotten that this "heroine of the Quakers," whose story Francesca has told so fully, lived

precisely here, and, being a mountain peasant, was not likely to have moved away, unless to the Campo Santo.

San Marcello was the village from which Faustina originally came. Here Francesca and her mother once spent a summer, and here Faustina was for ten days with Francesca, who wanted a companion, as she was sketching away from the house. Among other things she drew then was the fountain in the piazza (for "Roadside Songs"), which she drew, "as I saw it from the window where Faustina, sweetest of all the mountain-singers, used to sit and sing to me. She had a musical nature. She seemed as if she were all full of music; it was more natural to her than language: whenever she felt anything deeply, instead of speaking, she would begin to sing some story which had a bearing on it, that little ugly droll Faustina!"¹ Francesca took a fancy to this sweet voice and her lively, fanciful way of talking, and so engaged her as temporary attendant. Sometimes Faustina read aloud to her "Gerusalemme Liberata," "leaving out all the passages which described battles, because she was afraid her lover Beppe might have to go into battle some day." Faustina was only nineteen then, a dressmaker, whose love-story Francesca was deeply interested in. The girl "had uncommon intelligence, and though taught only to read, had taught herself to write also and even to read French!"

Our delight in the meeting now was mutual, especially as Faustina, like all the Italians who had known Francesca, thought I looked very like her. After we had talked a while, so eagerly that we fairly interrupted each other, and I had seen the letters

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 231.

Francesca wrote her frequently and her gift of a Testament (carefully wrapped in a handkerchief and laid away!), I said, "If I take you to Abetone in the automobile, could you show me where Francesca and her people lived?"

"I can show you all the places where she lived; there are several," she answered proudly. So off we went, that very afternoon. Faustina is quite prosperous now, with a boarding-house of her own, and a good farm. I found her waiting for me in her best stuff dress, with a lace kerchief over her head, in place of the figured cotton one of the morning, a gay breastpin, and a truly gorgeous ring on her work-worn finger, which she carried, like dear Margaret Ogilvie, "in such a way that the most reluctant must see." What a good ride we had, she pointing to every rock and tree Francesca loved, and I turning my head round so eagerly, to miss nothing, that it is a wonder that I did not twist it off, as they say an owl has been known to do.

Once on the way up, I saw a little band of girls, in rosy frocks, with big pink bows on their hair, like sweet peas. They were taken from the poorest in Florence, a new set sent up here for fresh air every ten days. Later, on a walk, I saw these same little flowers, a bit wilted now, grouped rather disconsolately on a mossy hillside. They had never learned to play as lively American children would do. Perhaps they were afraid of rumpling the pretty frocks, poor babies!

Thanks to that unfailing memory at my side, I discovered what, of course, I should never have known otherwise, that the Alexanders stayed first at Faustina's own house, at Piansenatico (then the post-office); then they lodged over the tobacconist's,

just below Abetone. Later they had some years at the Albergo del Governo Cesarto nel tempo di Leopardi (now Les Pyramides hotel). It was while they were there that Beatrice sang to Francesca, standing below. Then for many years they were at the Casa di Beppini, opposite, very near the church, all changed now. And last, Mr. Alexander bought the little dark gray stone house, right by the present Hotel Regina, called La Casina di Catani.

How she loved the whole region, which she knew so well! She was young when she first went there. As I scrambled up to some of her favorite haunts, like the Sasso della Cornaccia, I secretly thought that in the early days, she must have been as agile as a mountain-goat, for I was forced ignominiously to remove my shoes before I could manage the slippery grass-slope, leaning out at such a dizzy angle.

Everywhere I seemed to be hearing with her ears the church-bells, which Polissena said were "The Lord's voice"; to be looking with two pair of eyes, mine and hers, at the great mountain called "Libro Aperto" (or open book) because of the shape; at the Serra Bassa, a bare mountain off on the horizon: at the far gleam of the river Sestaione, of which she wrote Ruskin: ¹

If there is any place in the world more beautiful than that valley, I never saw it. It is all shut in by high, steep mountains, partly wooded, partly rising in great walls of rock, with beeches and alders clinging wherever they can find anything to cling to, and where there is not enough earth for these, wild roses, blackberry vines, and all sorts of mountain flowers, which have fallen or been washed down from the mountains, in spring; and over and among these the little river Sestaione goes down to join the Lima, in a succession of green pools

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 288.

and white cascades. The sun shines very warm in that narrow valley, for it is all so high; and strawberries grow everywhere, even between the stones in the middle of the stream; and in the summer days, when I went there, the air was all scented with the "Life Everlasting," as we call it in America [Ruskin adds that this is wild yellow amaranth]; and there was no sound but the sound of the water and occasional humming of a bee: and there are so many butterflies and other little bright-coloured noiseless creatures, busy among the flowers!

She adds a description of a queer rock there,¹ "detached from the precipice behind it and appearing like a tall square tower of regular shape, called the 'Tower of the Farrucchio,' and said to have beneath it buried treasure."

In one of her poems,² Abetone is reflected, like a forest in a clear still pool:

Where a single cleft, the rocks between,
Gave passage out of the valley green.
.
The rocks about them were sunken deep
In fern and bramble and purple heath,
That sloped away to the woods beneath;
While far below and on every side
Were endless mountains, and forests wide,
And scattered villages here and there,
That all looked near in the clear dry air.

There are several pictures in her books of Abetone; the one heading "Tuscan Songs," and another, in that same book, with the *rispetti* "I built a castle," of Cimone, the highest mountain in all the northern Apennines.

Way up above Pian degli Ontani, too steep a scramble for me to attempt, though so great was my longing that I was tempted to hire an airplane for the journey, are the strange "Sassi Scritti,"

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 289.

2. *H. S.*, p. 22.

or inscribed stones which Francesca describes,¹ stones with words cut in them, which none of the peasants can read; "in a different sort of writing," they say, "from any we know; but very beautiful to look at; they say these words were cut there by people who lived a very long time ago, nobody knows how long."

Describing a journey from Abetone to Bassano, in the fall of 1886, Francesca says: ²

The rose-bushes that were such masses and garlands of blossom when we went up the road in the spring were all covered now with their scarlet berries, close together, like strings of coral. For the first three miles or so the banks along the roadside were all scattered with clusters of fringed gentian and with the splendid *S. Pellegrino* thistles, nearly as large as a sunflower, pure white, and shining like mother-of-pearl.

They say that in the old Abetone days, Francesca wore brown cloth shoes, long and pointed, with little round heels, shoes that came from America. They remembered them well, because they were different — the first heels they had ever seen. I know that here she and her mother sometimes drove with handkerchiefs over their heads, and tied under their chins.

She knew and loved everyone, for miles around, seeing them with eyes love made blind to their faults, and perhaps, also, brought out their virtues, as the sun opens closed buds. As she says of her Ida, "She saw the poor neighbors, but to her they were all people to be loved, pitied, and sympathized with; whatever there was good in any of them, she found it out and ignored everything else. It was a peculiarity of my Ida that all the people with whom she was intimately acquainted were, in some way or other, remarkable." And again we see her in her own description

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 11.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

of "Angelica," of whom she writes, "I believe the truth is that everybody becomes 'Angelical' with our Angelica. She is so sweet and good that one cannot help it. And then she thinks that all the people she comes in contact with are saints." This method of willing people into virtue or strength by attributing to them the traits you desire them to possess is very modern psychology, but no one would have been more surprised than Francesca to be told that she produced the effect she saw in others.

She never forgot her friends either. When she was away, she sent them letters, presents, shawls, petticoats, scarves. When she was there, she entered into their lives, listening so sympathetically that the keys of their hearts were in her hand. She writes Mrs. Mason:

One afternoon I went to the house of our next-door neighbor at Abetone. She is an elderly widow who lives about quarter of a mile off through the woods, and I often go to her house and sit before her door, while she spins from a distaff and tells me endless stories of her own and her neighbors' lives. She is quite indifferent whether she receives either attention, or replies, and I sit in silence and think my own thoughts or admire the beautiful view, for she lives at the highest part of the road and you can see a great extent of woods and mountains and the fields in the distant valley, and the air is pure and cool.

And again, she writes gayly:

Sandra mentioned she was in debt for a year's schooling for Michele Angelo. She considered him a mirror of learning: and as the terms of instruction were only half a franc (ten cents then) a month, I thought he must at least get his money's worth, more particularly as they did not pay. We tried him with the large letters on the title-page of a book. He knew some of them and his sister, who must inherit her mother's faculty of making the best of things, said that probably the letters were different down at Fiumalbo.

Fiumalbo is a little cluster of houses in a ravine, almost in the bed of a river, just below Abetone.

She knew how bleak a life the men lived who went to work in the Tuscan Maremma (a region robbed of its terrors now, by draining the marshes). She writes of it:

Many of those who work there in the winter come home with the fever and, at the very best, they work hard and gain little. If a man brings home one hundred francs, he thinks he does very well. They work all day and half the night, and they live in little temporary huts that they make for themselves. They sleep on planks, for they say they have so much wood about, they do not dare to have straw on account of fire, and they eat nothing but polenta.

She knew how hard it had been for Isabella and the other women to clear the snow from the government road, snow so deep that sometimes it obliterated every landmark, "and a row of tall black poles had to be planted so that travellers might find their way." She knows that if a sheep strays into the government woods, its owner is fined. She knew what hard masters were the government overseers, and tells indignantly that one of them fined a girl one fourth of her day's wages, sixty centimes (less than twenty cents), if she just goes into the house to warm her frozen hands. She knows, too, that often this, or in spring, the picking of a valuable kind of mushroom that grows under the snow was the women's only means of livelihood. How tenderly she described the death of Matilda's husband, when the snow was so deep that neither doctor nor priest could get to him. I always loved that story best of all — the dying man's whispering over the prayers for the dying, adding the perfect plea, "Lord, Jesus, forgive my sins and teach me the way to come to Thee."¹ Because of her love, Francesca understood how real a thing is their religion to these mountain-folk — even the child Armida, terri-

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 141.

fied by the wild man on her lonely road, and saying her tremulous "Our Father," then singing the rest of the way, so as not to be frightened, for go on she must, for the sake of her little family.¹

How quickly Francesca noticed that old Petrucci of Piansenatico planted in his little garden only sweet-scented flowers, which of course were the only ones his blind wife could enjoy.² He did not care for the hollyhocks and sunflowers which pleased his neighbors, but he had plenty of lavender and other sweet herbs, and sweet-williams and the most beautiful sweet roses that were anywhere to be found. In the season, when these were in bloom the whole house was filled with the perfume.

She knew old Assunta, who used to come over to Abetone every Sunday, with her donkey Garibaldi loaded with garden stuff to sell; and Serafina "who lives," she writes in the Masons' book "in one of the loveliest places about Abetone, and had a very old house, which people used to say had been there when the road was made, and nobody at Abetone knew how to date back any farther." Her husband was an excellent man, but poor Serafina was an invalid; "so I used to take her little presents of fruit, vegetables, meat, and other things her husband could not afford." Again she writes: "The charcoal-burners and wood-cutters who, with a few shepherds, make up the whole population of Abetone have, for the most part, enough money for their very moderate needs." But even here she discovered need she could relieve.

Here, too, she and her mother often used their gift of healing, only grieving when their help was asked for maladies beyond their powers. By a simple medicine they saved the life of poor

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 132.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 276.

Matilda Seghi's only surviving baby. Then a girl was ill and Francesca said,¹ "Mamma knows just what to do for that particular kind of illness. She has, with the Lord's help, cured two or three cases for which the doctors could do nothing." At another time, as she told me, a woman here was taken violently ill, as Francesca guessed, from over-indulgence in plums. Mrs. Alexander administered a simple home remedy, and the woman promptly recovered.

But the matter did not end there. Far and wide spread the report of the cure, and soon began to arrive, singly and in groups, the sick and sad from every direction, to be healed by the "miraculous" power of this uncanonized saint. Poor Francesca was distracted. She gave what simple help she could, but pleaded that the power was only human, that she could but administer homely remedies, for ordinary ailments which flesh is heir to. In vain were all her protestations. No one would believe that she could not, if she would, work miracles. The day after she had cured the woman of the plums, the patient's sister came to kiss Francesca's *mani santi*,² and burst into tears. Francesca thought that she too was ill, and inquired; but the woman said, "Oh, no, I am merely overcome at seeing someone who works miracles."

After that, all sorts of sick people came for healing — even a boy who was deaf and dumb and a girl who had been an idiot from birth. Francesca gave such remedies as she knew, but, of course, had to send most of them away. The most tragic case of all was one she herself told me about. A young peasant arrived one day, in a rough wagon, bringing his extraordinarily beautiful

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 178.

2. Holy hands.

young wife (Francesca said, "She was the loveliest woman I ever saw — like the Madonna"). As he tenderly lifted her out, Francesca, even with her inexperience, saw that the disease was mortal. But as, with tears of pity streaming from her kind eyes, she tried to explain to him her helplessness, the sturdy young husband, trembling and pale under his tan, said imploringly, "Signorina, we have come thirty miles for your help. Look, I have been working all summer in the Maremma, and have earned 300 lire. It is all yours if only you will cure my wife" (or, in his pretty Italian phrase, "la confidante del mio cuore").¹ When at last, heartbroken and only half-persuaded, these simple people drove slowly away, poor Francesca dissolved in tears; and she said to me, "That is the saddest memory of my life."

She says, in Mrs. Mason's book, "Mama has really gained quite a reputation for her medical skill. She has certainly cured many complaints, chiefly by giving her patients enough to eat."

So sure were the contadini of her sympathy and help that once, in a bitter winter, peasants from way up in the mountains came to Florence for her aid, and were found, miles from her house, inquiring for "Signora Lucia" and "Signorina Francesca."

The person at Abetone who interested her most, however, was the celebrated improvisatrice, Beatrice degli Ontani, who used to sing to her impromptu *stornelli* of great beauty. Very famous was this peasant poetess, of whom many tales are current there. She is mentioned in the appendix to Ouida's "Village Commune." With all her poetic power mingled often a trenchant wit, which enchanted her fellow-mountaineers. Of all the tales I heard of

1. The confidant of my heart.

her, I liked best that of her unexpected visit, one day, to Francesca, who was just then entertaining Contessa Caselli. Greeting the singer with the same gracious courtesy she showed the Countess, Francesca said to her presently, "Sing for us." Abashed, the peasant answered, "I am only a poor contadina and can't put two words together." But when Francesca said again, "Courage! Sing!" she began at once with this improvisation (quoted in "Tuscan Songs"):

Ricco non é chi di bei pani é ornato:
 Povero non é colui chi é mal vestito:
 Ma ricco chi *ha* la pace e l'umiltade,
 Chi ha la carità verso il nemico,
 Ricco colui chi tien Gesù nel cuore;
 Vive felice, e poi, contento muore.¹

Beatrice lived at Pian di Novello, on La Strada Capel 'Orlando, in a house under awful rocks, very hard to get to. Once, after a snowslide, they were so utterly covered with snow that they had to be dug out, after several days.

"She was n't handsome," said Faustina, "but *simpatica*."² Francesca's portrait of her, however, is lovely, with wonderful inspired eyes. Francesca says that the light in those eyes seemed to come from within and adds, "Whenever I see the sun shining into deep water, it always makes me think of her eyes." Her voice, they say, was "like an angel's."

1. He is not rich who is decked in fine clothes,
 Nor is he poor who is ill-clad.
 But rich is the possessor of peace and humility,
 The man who shows charity to his enemy,
 Rich indeed is one who has God in his heart;
 He lives happy, he dies content.

2. Pleasing.

She used to wear a skirt of coarse cloth, a red waist, a handkerchief on her head, folded back, and her curls hanging down. She talked poetry always, joked, laughed, was especially quick at repartee. Once someone said to her, "Io mangio cica, e tu dell'agli."¹ To which she answered:

Di Cutigliano è lungo il vostro porto,
E l'agli me li semino nel' orto.²

Once she and a famous man-singer contended for three days and nights in *ottava rima*. Her last was:

Se tu sei sarto quanto sei poeta,
Povero panno e disgraziata seta.³

She won!

I have heard other rhymes of hers less quotable, but equally applauded by the by-standers.

Francesca says in the Preface to the "Roadside Songs":

She was one of the most wonderful women whom I ever knew — daughter of a stone-mason at Melo, whom she accompanied to his winter labors in the Maremma; and as she grew larger, helped at his work by bringing him stones for the walls and bridges which he built, carrying them balanced on her head. She had no education in the common sense of the word, never learning even the alphabet, but she had a wonderful memory and could sing or recite long pieces of poetry. . . On her wedding day, according to the old custom of the country, one or two poets improvised verses suitable to the occasion; and as she listened to them, suddenly she felt in herself a new power, and began to sing the poetry which was then born in her mind. . . From that time forth, she was the great poetess of all that part of the country, and was sent for to sing and recite at weddings and other festivals for miles round. . . Sing she must and sing she did, for it was what the Lord made her for.

1. (I eat nothing: you eat garlic.)

2. Cutigliano is far from your door,
There garlic — or leeks — seed themselves in the garden; (or, are "to be had for the asking").

3. If you are as bad a tailor as you are poet,
Poor cloth, ruined silk!

Once, when the harvest failed, Beatrice thought the Alexanders could help her; so with her usual energy, she packed a ball of butter and some chestnut cakes in a little basket . . . and set off from Pian di Novello for Florence, all alone. She did not know our name or where we lived, but she knew that we came from America and that we were called Lucia and Francesca, and as everyone at Abetone knew us, she supposed that everyone in Florence would do the same. Much of the way she walked; a strange man carried her for some miles in his *barroccio* for charity; the last part of her journey she came by railroad. Our house is pretty near the station, and Beatrice, as if guided by Providence, stopped to ask for us at the shop of a wood- and charcoal-seller, who knew us and recognized us from her description.

There still lives, at Il Bicchieri, an old man of eighty, Luigi Ferrari, who once sang with Beatrice. Her niece, too, L'Ernesta, is still living near by.

Francesca says that her mother was Beatrice's favorite, and she describes the singer's farewell *ottava* to the American she admired so intensely. Once, Francesca arranged to have Beatrice meet another, more widely famous improvisatrice, Giannina Milli, at Abetone. This meeting we have an account of, in Part VII of "Christ's Folk." Francesca writes:

Once, a great many years ago, Giannina was staying at San Marcello . . . and wrote me word that she should like to meet Beatrice, whom she had long wished to see. They had exchanged letters, already, in verse. I wrote Beatrice's, from her dictation, and read her Giannina's when it arrived. Very remarkable letters they were, on both sides. So a little boy was despatched over the mountains to the Valley of the Sestaione, with a message, and on the appointed day Beatrice did not fail to come, in the black dress and embroidered white veil, apron, and handkerchief in which she was married. . . . I shall never forget how, when they met, the elder and happier poetess took the younger and more heavily burdened one in her arms and kissed her on both cheeks saying, "We ought to love each other, for we are sisters." Then Beatrice began to sing, in her peculiar chant, praying Giannina to answer her; and she sang *ottava* after *ottava*, until, to our dismay, Giannina rose, her face kindling, and prepared to improvise a sonnet herself, to our dismay, for you

must know that Giannina's singing is not like anyone's else. She throws herself by some power that we cannot comprehend into a state something like possession, if there were such a thing as being possessed by a good spirit instead of a bad one, and words come to her that do not seem to be her own. She cannot explain it herself so as to make us understand it, but she always suffers for it afterwards . . . I cannot remember what her sonnet was; people said that it was very wonderful; I am afraid I hardly heard it. All that I can remember is a strange painful feeling as if my dear friend had changed into some beautiful, terribly beautiful supernatural creature, so were her face and voice changed. After a little she sat down, trembling, flushed, and tearful, and I had my Giannina back again.

Beatrice lived to be ninety. She is buried at Pian degli Ontani, but under the loggia at the Commune di Cutigliano, where she lived after she was married, is the following inscription — the only one, so far as I know, erected in Italy to a peasant!

A commemorar il centinaio primo della nascita di Beatrice, pastora del Pian degli Ontari, che ignara d'ogni lettera, per spontanea virtù di genio le grazie del nativo idioma profuse nella poesia improvvisa, come fiori che spunti incolto dalla terra madre e dia colori e fragranza. Rivelata da Niccoló Tommaseo e cara ai letterati del tempo il comune di memori di questa pura, gloria paesara, augurando che la tradizione del canto venga mai meno nell'anima popolare e la vena della poesia spontanea fluisca sempre limpida e pebenne come le acque acendente da queste gioghi alpestre, Questa Lapida apponeva il 29 Agosto, 1902.¹

The village of Cutigliano, seven miles from Abetone, is the one Francesca described thus: ²

1. To commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Beatrice, a shepherdess of Pian degli Ontani, who, though without education, by virtue of inborn genius, turned her beautiful tongue into impromptu poetry, like flowers which spring from their mother-earth without cultivation, and give color and fragrance. In memory of their pure and glorious compatriot, discovered by Niccoló Tommaseo and dear to the literary people of her time, the community erected this stone, on the 29th of August, 1902, hoping that the tradition of her song will never grow dim in the minds of the people, and that the spring of native poetry may always gush forth, clear as the brooks from the Alpine gorges.

2. *R. S. of T.*, p. 157.

Cutigliano is one of the prettiest, most unspoiled old towns in the country: on a steep mountain slope, overhanging the Lima, with its church said to have been built by the Countess Matilda . . . and the immense and ancient fortress beside it, catching the eye for a long way up and down the road. . . It has a grand Palazzo del Commune, with inscriptions and coats of arms built into the walls, recalling the various podestà who once bore rule there. . . and steep narrow streets, just flights of low steps, but with beautiful gardens between the old houses and roses and jessamines hanging over the walls.

Later, Francesca tells us of festivals of this mountainous region, like Matilde Segli's wedding,¹ when everybody walked in procession to the little Abetone church, "with Tolini, the violin player from Cutigliano, and his son playing a lively tune at their head. After the wedding there was a dance and Domenico Segli, her father, though an old man" [ninety-three!] outshone everybody else as a dancer, and went through the most extraordinary performances, spinning about sometimes on one foot or sometimes on the other. . ." After general dancing, working up to a great pitch of excitement, "Matilde's brother, the first singer of the country, sang some verses . . . in a very grand voice like an organ. . . At last they marched off in procession again with the two violins at their head, and friends firing salutes from the houses along the way."

In another book, she says:² "Once at L'Abetone they had a Christmas performance of the Nativity, followed by Pulcinella," which seemed a queer combination! As Francesca herself saw this, she must have been in the mountains at least once in winter, at Christmas.

And then there is the *giostra*, which is, she says,³

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 137.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 286.

a sort of theatrical performance, carried on in the open air, and usually representing the life of some saint or other religious subject. Some beautiful place is always chosen for the *giostra*, where the ground has a little the form of an amphitheatre, and the spectators sit or stand on the grass while the performers sing the words to a peculiar and, it is said, very ancient chant, with an accompaniment of violin and violoncello. With those strong, mountain voices, every word can be distinguished at a great distance.

Francesca discovered at Abetone, she writes, "fast passing away, a veritable mine of traditional treasure," which she lost no opportunity of saving, writing them down day by day, as she heard them from the lips of her peasant friends. She used to go often to see old Marguerita of the Cima and listen to her stories. From her also she learned the lovely prayer, a variant on our "Now I lay me down to sleep":¹

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 337.

Tre o quattr' angeli di Dio
Tutti intorno a letto mio,
Due di piedi, e due da capo,
Jesú Christo al mio lato.
Jesú Christo mi dissi
Che vegliesse o che dormisse
Che paura non avesse,
Ne di vivi ne di morte
Ne degli spiriti cattivi.
Se quest' anima si dovesse
Levare prima del corpo,
Jesú mio, da mi conforto.²

2. Three or four of God's angels around my bed,
Two at my feet, and two at my head,
Jesus Christ at my side.
Jesus Christ said to me that, asleep or awake, I should never fear the living or the dead or evil spirits.
O Jesus Christ, if my soul should rise before my body, give me comfort!

Very soon after their arrival in Italy, Francesca and her father had begun to collect ballads sold on the streets — songs of the *contadini*, and curious old song-books long out of print. To these she added innumerable lovely tales of real life or of legend — as in Wordsworth's "Reaper," songs about "old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago"; or

Some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of today,
Some natural sorrow, love, or pain,
That has been and may be again.

She used to write them out for Ruskin's pleasure, and, largely at his urgency, selected those she liked best, and illustrated them, making a manuscript book which she never thought of having published, but which she intended to sell, as she had sold the others, for the benefit of her beloved poor. It was in Abetone that she found the material for "Roadside Songs of Tuscany," "Christ's Folk in the Apennines," the "Sorellaccia," and a few of the poems in "Hidden Servants."

In later years, after her friendship with Ruskin began, she sent all her drawings to him. He gave her very minute instruction as to what she was to do, as I have said before. One series of drawings that he ordered included one of a waterfall, which was, she says, the hardest thing she ever did.

But the last days at Abetone and the parting were rather sad. The religious persecution of which I have spoken, the consequence of Francesca's earnest missionary zeal with her Testament, began to be apparent. It culminated one night, when the mother, with some inexplicable, curious presentiment, said to

Francesca, "Sleep in another room to-night"; and oddly enough, hours later, someone threw a stone into the window, which would surely have struck Francesca if she had been in the usual place. So, reluctantly deciding that a few of the people they loved must have become *cattivi*, or bad, they left, to return no more, though the old love was strong enough to make Francesca soon forget the unfortunate rift, and remember only the sweet music of the mountain lute.

CHAPTER XV

VENICE AND BASSANO

LATER still, I went up to Bassano in the Veneto, on the Brenta River, between the mountains and the plain. Here the Alexanders stayed months at a time, and the place is full of their memory.

Bassano is not far from Venice, which they had always loved, going there for weeks, to stay at the Hotel Danielli, all their arrangements made for them in advance by their devoted friend Signor Bortolo Zanchetta, of Bassano. Miss Anna Fuller describes Francesca's room there, "A quiet, green-latticed room, overlooking the Grand Canal." I saw Francesca there once, and as she came to greet me, dressed in just the same utterly simple way as always, I felt that she and the gay tourists, with whom the hotel was then full, belonged to different centuries.

They had always the same gondolier, Giovanni Tagliapietra, of Calle Venturi Santa Stefano 2918 (the one prayed for by Mrs. Alexander, in the prayer quoted earlier). In the privately printed diary of Mrs. Lee is an entry dated Venice, 1892: "Mrs. Alexander said: 'Now, my dears, we must have an ice,' so we rowed to the Piazzetta and soon ices were brought down to the gondolas and we sat there and ate them. She ordered for the gondoliers as well as for us, for she does n't like to have anyone left out."

Francesca loved intensely San Marco, with its dusky splendor. On one of their stays there, she writes Ruskin:¹

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 129.

We go every day to San Marco, and I have never seen the time yet when I was ready to leave it. There was never such another church: every year when we come back to it, it seems more beautiful than when we left it. Mammina takes the "Stones of Venice" and reads to us the explanations of the mosaics and so on . . . in Italian, translating as she goes along, so that Signor Bortolo and Edwige may enjoy it all with us. Edwige said, when we left the church, "I think the people who built this church must have been very wise, but the church itself was made for common people, because it is all arranged so that we can understand it."

In 1888, she writes Ruskin: ¹

There is no use my writing you about the great things in Venice, of which you have written yourself as no one will ever write again. . . . The gondoliere's wife has asked leave to be present when Edwige and I have our daily reading: she is a bright woman and it is very pleasant to see her interest; also pleasant to hear Edwige's very simple and sensible explanations of such passages as she thinks her dear friend may not understand. But the best of all is when we come to any subject represented in these mosaics, to see how Catina brightens up, how well she remembers it, what a reality it immediately assumes to her. "St. Mark still preaches." If you only knew how often I think of those words of yours.

Two especial friends of hers here were the Patriarch of Venice, Cardinale Agostini, and Padre Alishan of the Armenian Convent, on an island near Venice. Of the second she writes Ruskin: ² "Padre Alishan is, I think, the oldest of the frati and I have always looked upon him as a sort of saint. He has been our friend for a great many years. . . . When he is excited, he mixes his Venetian with Armenian in a most bewildering manner." Tremendously touched by the "Story of Ida," he gave Francesca a photograph of his lovely young niece, who had much resembled Ida, ³ saying that "he did not think it right for him, a frate, to love anything earthly so much," and begging her to keep the picture

1. *C. F. in A.*, part VII.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 156.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

with Ida's story always. Francesca says: "He is one of the best men in the world. He had written some interesting books in his own language, one, 'The Life of an Armenian Saint,' has been translated into French and he gave me a copy of it."

Of the other friend, the Patriarch of Venice, she writes often. In "Roadside Songs of Tuscany"¹ she writes (1884):

Today I saw for the first time a man who passes for a saint and looks as if he might be so: the Patriarch of Venice. He was just going to his gondola, a grand-looking man, not so old as I had expected, dressed all in a long red robe. His face was full of goodness. As he reached the steps, all the people in the calle crowded about him, to kiss his hand and ask his blessing; priests, well-dressed ladies, men going to their work, ragged little children. Some caught the border of his dress and raised it to their lips: some dropped on their knees; he could hardly liberate himself from them, but was very kind and gentle and patient with them all. It was a very pretty sight. They say he leads the life of a hard-working parish priest, rather than a bishop, and is loved here beyond all expression.

Then, in 1886, she writes a description of her visit to the Patriarch with Signor Bortolo Zanchetta, the Patriarch's nephew:²

I had imagined him among all sorts of grand surroundings, in some magnificently furnished room, with servants in gorgeous liveries to wait outside the door and he himself very stately and imposing: and instead, I saw only one servant, a rather shabbily dressed little old man, gossiping with an old beggar woman in the hall; and when he made out what we wanted (he was quite deaf), he led us up the broad white marble stairs, into a large room, very clean, but furnished without the least regard to either elegance or comfort, or anything else, I should think, except economy (a hair-cloth sofa, a good deal worn, and half a dozen chairs to match, with two ordinary tables, were all I saw: and the great room looked nearly empty). After a few minutes, the Patriarch himself appeared and met us with much kindness. He did not offer me his hand, but gave it to Signor Bortolo, who kissed it, bending on one knee. I need not describe his appearance since you have his portrait, only he looks a

1. Page 118.

2. *C. F. in A.*, p. 152.

little thinner and older than when that was taken, and is tired and careworn. His manners were gentle and quiet, but not in the least stately: one could hardly imagine him a cardinal; he seems like a humble, gentle-spirited Christian, such as I have known so often among the poor . . . not very different from Edwige's old mother, and wearing himself out for his church, as she wore herself out for her children. He was very polite and seemed to wish that our visit should be a pleasant one; but I noticed that the mention of a sacred name brought a new and singular light into his face (which is the principal sign, I think, by which we recognize the "hidden servants"). . . When we rose to go, he accompanied us to the door and stood holding it open for us, instead of calling a servant, as might have been expected; then he opened another door, and said, "Only see how I live." It was a room quite as poor as the first, but with the tables and chairs covered with heaps of papers all lying in confusion. He sighed as he said, "All these papers must be attended to!" . . . I am afraid that he is too heavily burdened . . . and is perhaps one of those people who take things too much to heart. The condition of the poor in Venice seems to weigh much upon his mind, and they say that he does many things not expected of people of his rank, . . . hearing the confessions of obscure people, etc. He was so kind as to ask us to come and see him sometimes, when we come back to Venice. . . . I thought you would like to hear about him because one does not see a living saint every day; or at least, if we do, we do not know it.

The Patriarch became a close friend of Francesca's, who always went to see him when she was in Venice. His remark about her, when his nephew, Signor Zanchetta, went to him, troubled because she was still outside the true church, shows his exquisite appreciation of her own pure character. Signor Zanchetta was a very ardent Catholic (both his city and his country houses have precious relics in their chapels: his nephew's marriage had the Papal blessing of Pius X). But when he went to the Patriarch, to ask about the necessity of trying to convert the gentle American to the same faith, the old Cardinal, who was evidently as wise as Pope Leo, answered: "Non dica parola, cavaliere: sarebbe un

peccato turbare la pace di una creatura ch' io credo permanente conservi anche nella sua tarda età, l'innocenza battesmale." ¹

So Signor Bortolo was content, trusting to the wisdom of his holy uncle.

But, much as they loved Venice, they spent far more time at Bassano. Two wide-apart dates of letters from there are 1884 and 1907. So I welcomed an invitation to spend a few days there, with her friends the Zanchettas. I was met at the station by Signor Agostino Zanchetta, nephew of the late Signor Bortolo, who was Francesca's closest friend. I fear I disappointed his expectations a little, first by descending from a second-class carriage, then by appearing alone. He said to me with gentle concern, "Where is your maid?"

"I have none," said I, frankly.

"How brave of you to travel so far alone!" said he, a little troubled.

"I have been as brave as that all my life," I confessed.

Then we went to his beautiful house, which he inherited from his uncle, and where he lives with his delightful mother, Signora Laura, and his three wee girls. After dinner, we sat in the garden, where the moon filtered through the great cypresses and turned to rippling silver the fountain, and to snow the marble maiden's shoulders, wet with its spray. "Francesca gave us that statue," said the Signora, in her gentle voice, with the slight upward inflection, characteristic of all the Veneto.

"Shall I play to you?" said Signor Agostino; "she gave me also my piano," and going inside, he played magnificently.

1. Say no word, my son; it would be a pity to disturb the peace of one who, as I believe, has always kept, even to her advanced age, her baptismal innocence.

He took me, in those few wonderful days, to see all the places most closely linked with the Alexanders' memory. I saw the Church of S. Giovanni, where Francesca heard Mass every day but Sunday. She used often to arrange the flowers for the altar here, as the priest was a friend of hers.

We went to the Cucine Economiche to see the work begun by their friend Signor Bortolo, a pious institution, where, for six months of every winter, more than two hundred portions of soup and potatoes are distributed every day to the very poor. The Alexanders always gave generously to this work, which is now maintained largely by Signor Agostino, with contributions from charitable citizens of Bassano.

Then we saw the Museo Civico, to which the Alexanders gave, for the coin-collection, twenty-eight Venetian "decchini," very rare coins of the time of the Doges.

Every day of their stay here, Signor Bortolo went to see them, and took Francesca's mother to drive. Once she bought two hundred of the bags they take to market with them, and gave them away full, one at a time. She had a mania for giving, and a passion for buying. She bought quantities of things every day. As I saw the open market, with its wealth of tempting articles, and more still, when I went to an antiquarian's shop, just off the main Piazza, I confess I did n't blame her. At the latter shop, I saw magnificent carved chests, wonderful and delicately wrought iron work, some with crystal, and splendid mantel-pieces, of marble delicately wrought with *putti*, wreaths, and garlands — like those in the palace of Urbino, enough to tempt anyone to purchase. Even Signor Zanchetta, resident though he was,

loitered long enough to invest in some "trifle light as air" of Venetian glass.

The Zanchettas have satchels full of Francesca's letters, for she wrote Signor Bortolo nearly every day. So devoted was he that once, when there had been a financial panic in America, without consulting the Alexanders as to whether they were touched by the disaster, he decided that they must be in financial straits and went among his friends, collecting quite a large sum, which he brought them, with charming delicacy in the manner of offering it. Francesca was beside his bedside in this very house when he died, and said, "From that cypress a bird flew up just then, I think an angel to carry his soul to Heaven."

Signor Agostino, as a boy, was one of those who stood around her, at the Rezzonico Palace here, to listen to her stories. At seventeen he ran away from college and took refuge with Mrs. Alexander in Florence; and she stood by him and insisted that his uncle should not send him back, so he did n't. In this snatched holiday, the boy played to a group of her friends, Prince Ghica and others. He is a Commendatore, President of the Bank, and a lawyer. The last summer of Francesca's life, she asked him to come to Florence to help her make a new will, for she knew to whom she meant to give all her possessions (the splendid Gian da Bologna crucifix, for example, and many of her paintings she had intended for a room in the Riccardi Palace, in memory of her mother, and so on). But Signor Zanchetta said: "It is so terribly hot now; Wait till cold weather"; and they delayed, alas! until she died, without executing her wishes.

One of the Zanchetta family, Signora Maria (who was eighty-

five in 1885), was "Superiora" of a girls' orphan asylum there, and was called "Mother of the Orphans" for the splendid work she did voluntarily,¹ "wearing the same dress as the poor girls . . . overseeing the washing, giving a hand to the mending, leading the same humble, laborious life they did," says Francesca. She speaks approvingly of this orphanage, especially as regards the girls' appearance: "In most such places, the girls have their hair cut close to their heads and wear the ugliest clothes that can possibly be obtained . . . and look dull and dispirited, with an air of being educated by machinery. . . Here they look pretty as possible in the poor clothes afforded them, . . . their hair is arranged becomingly, . . . they look happy." Francesca's drawings of this asylum are at Newnham.

The most important place Signor Zanchetta showed me was, of course, the Rezzonico Palace, a mile from the city, where Francesca and her mother stayed always, with her beloved friend Contessa Silvia Pasolini-Zanelli.

Palazzo Rezzonico was built by the same architect who built the Palazzo Imperiale at San Pietro Borgo, a man named De Quarenghi. It was, I think, the summer home of the family to whom Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice, best known to us now as the house in which Robert Browning died, originally belonged. The Countess was the only one of Francesca's friends, says Signor Zanchetta, who was ever jealously fond of her, wishing to keep her all to herself. The Countess was very delicate, and, Francesca says, "has had enough to sober her besides her poor health and scientific propensities!"

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 76.

The house is now deserted and tragic in its echoing desolation. The last heir stripped it of everything. Even the great garden where Francesca walked and sat is an unkempt tangle of weeds, her favorite stone seat broken, and where her own wee garden once blossomed, just outside the kitchen-window, I found only one tiny sprig of mint, to keep fragrant her memory, a hidden sweetness, humble and healing like her own spirit.

Her mother and she were given, for their own, the detached wing of the palace, called the "Barchesa," but as it was all on the ground floor, and the mother was timid, they moved to a second-floor suite of lofty rooms, on the left, over the entrance. There is a splendid marble staircase, up and down which, Signor Zanchetta told me, Francesca climbed twenty times or so a day, on errands for her mother, carrying up the meals for them both, which she cooked over a charcoal fire in a sort of kitchenette on the ground floor. The poisonous fumes of the charcoal, over which she unconsciously bent too close, were the real cause of her later blindness. As she wrote Ruskin:¹ "After the cucina economica had disabled my eyes," etc. When I read this, before I went to Bassano myself, I had been puzzled, confusing the name with that of the charitable soup kitchen described above. But in her time, the name was given to iron cooking-ranges, a novelty in Italy.

In 1900 she writes Ruskin² of "Young Count Piero Zanelli, the only remaining child of Count Giuseppe Pasolini-Zanelli," a boy whom she has known and loved from infancy, and she says, "We were staying at the house of his beloved and still

1. *R. S. of T.*, p. 220.

2. *H. S.*, p. 132.

beautiful grandmother, at Bassano." When this young lad died, a few months later, she says: "With him came to an end the families of Pasolini-Zanelli of Faenza and Seneticolo of Bassano, the last being the only surviving descendant of the Seneticolo who worked in mosaic at Torcello." She loved this lad so dearly that always on the anniversary of his death, she wore black.

It was in this palace that Francesca broke her leg. (I saw the very room and the slippery floor — no wonder she fell!) As she lay in bed there for months after, she said, "See how good God is! I might have broken it in Florence, with nothing to see. But now I have the Madonna [a picture fastened up on the foot of her bed] for good company, and this view of the mountains. How fortunate I am!"

Splendid indeed are these mountains on which her eyes rested, though when I saw them, they were scarred by the Great War, with zigzag trenches across their face, and ominous holes where shells had torn their way. Very still they are now, and the barbed wire rusts in the rains; but in our sore memories that terrible tumult of so few years ago sounds yet. I gave thanks silently that tender-hearted Francesca did not have that awful association with the heights she looked up at.

At first, when she lay here, helpless, she did not care to have light or to read. But when peasants came from the country, bringing wild flowers enough to cover her bed, she revived. After a long time of patient suffering, her mother told me, suddenly she called for her stick and got up and began to walk, though she was always very lame, and, on her return to Florence, rarely left the house again. The mother said, "The peasants had all been pray-

ing for her, and whatever you think, I believe she recovered, thanks to their prayers."

In September, 1888, Ruskin went, with the young architect Mr. Detmer Blow, to Bassano, to stay with the Alexanders, "among the kindest people in the world," as he writes in his diary for that month. He was then already feeble and depressed.

Many of Francesca's letters to Ruskin are dated from the Rezzonico Palace. For instance, she writes him: ¹

It was a warm summer's evening, and Silvia and I were sitting, as we often do, on the broad stone steps of the Rezzonico Palace, between the two immense old stone lions that guard the door, and watching the sunset behind the mountains, and Silvia was telling me how, when she was a very small child, seven little African slave-girls [brought by a missionary from Africa and put under the care of the orphanage at Bassano] were brought to the house, and what wild black faces they had and what brilliant eyes. As they were running about the wide lawn behind Palazzo Rezzonico, they caught sight of those stone lions by the door and immediately pressed about them and fell to embracing them, as if they had been dear friends, and covered them with tears and kisses.

May 15, 1884, she writes: ² "Our friend Count Pasolini, with whom we are staying, lost an old servant, last year, at the age of one hundred years and four months. She was quite childish and helpless, but he took her death so much to heart that it made him quite ill, and he put off a journey at much inconvenience that he might not miss attending her funeral."

In 1886 she writes him: ³ "Silvia has arranged for our annual pilgrimage to Castelfranco and the Giorgione Madonna tomorrow, and Signor Bortolo Zanchetta is going to take us to Rivolta on Monday."

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 80.

2. *R. S. of T.*, p. 78.

3. *C. F. in A.*, p. 122.

Another time she writes: ¹

The evenings have grown too cold for me to sit on the doorstep and tell the children stories in the afternoon, so now we all sit around the table with lighted candles, and my duties have become somewhat heavier, as all the family attend, and I have to choose some story that will please everybody, from the grandmother to little Bobo. Yesterday evening, I am sorry to say, Silvia and Pierino had a quarrel as to which should have the seat next to me, to hear Beauty and the Beast (for the third or fourth time), and I had to make peace by putting myself in the middle, after inquiring which was the older child of the two. My audience consists of Maria, Silvia, the little German governess, and the two children. Besides these, we have often a friend of the family who comes in to pass the evening, a sober, poor, hard-working, elderly school-mistress. And they are all very critical and will not allow me to slight any part of my story, and ask me the most difficult questions. Bobo, last night, would know who kept the Beast's palace in order, cooked the supper, and they expected me to describe minutely the dresses that Cinderella wore to the ball, on both occasions, also her sisters' dresses.

Happy days these, for Francesca! Friends of all ranks were hers here, from Sir Frederick Leighton, who was several times with them, delighting in Mrs. Alexander's stories, to the life-long servant of the Zanchettas, who is still alive, still in service, still remembering that gentle American friend with tears of genuine affection. There was Countess Maria Bagishini, and charming Countess Cietta Defini Carli, merry, witty, and full also of loving memories. The latter I met at the Zanchettas', and was amused to hear my host confide in her, when he thought me too busy talking to his delightful mother to listen to him, "She looks like Francesca, very much, only not quite so homely, perhaps. You know Francesca *was* very plain [*brutta*]."

Now the palace was the most ghost-haunted place I ever saw, the only cheerful creatures there being a puppy and a kitten,

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 149.

rolling over and over on the gravel outside. One old servant, half-demented with seeing all the family die, one by one, lives there alone, her iron cot set in the midst of a huge, empty room, her company the ghosts. She burst into tears when she heard that Francesca's cousin had come, and hurried ahead to throw open one heavy pair of wooden shutters after another, letting in the unaccustomed sunlight to flood those dusty cells of memory. When at last she brought out, wrapped in a newspaper, faded sprigs of flowers "saved for Francesca," I saw the odd flicker in her eyes, and my throat suddenly swelled with unshed tears.

Twelve miles from Bassano, in the Italian Tyrol, is Asiago, a place which Francesca often refers to. She says,¹ "It is a place beloved alike of geologists and antiquarians, and the old seat of government of the Setti Comuni, which kept a sort of half-independence for I should be afraid to say how many years, under the Venetian Republic. It is the strangest, most out-of-the-world corner of the Veneto." There Francesca and her mother once stayed some time, at the Tavern of the Golden Star. It is farther up in the mountains than Bassano, at the head of a sequestered valley. They were there surely in 1885, 1886, and 1887, for in those years, many letters are dated from there.

There's a lovely description of the country in a letter to Ruskin:²

The road all the way from Bassano to the Setti Comuni is the most beautiful that can be imagined, especially in the higher parts, where it winds, often through woods, filled with the most beautiful of mountain-flowers; and at nearly every turn, we see the great plain spread out beneath us like the sea, widening always (in appearance) under our eyes as we ascend, sprinkled with cities and villages and with hills rising out of it like islands. Finally, after a

1. *C. F. in A.*, p. 39.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

day's journey, about sunset, one finds oneself in another plain (or rather, a great stretch of undulating country) very high up in the air: one of the great altopiani of the Alps. . . One peculiarity of the country is that you never feel as if you were among the mountains at all. The horizon on all sides is low, and not very distant: the ground forming itself everywhere into long, low swells; but constantly, as one draws near the edge, the top of some faraway mountain of wild and fantastic shape rises into sight, so distant as to appear little more than a blue shadow in the sky, and makes one remember, for a moment only, the immense country between it and us, lying almost at our feet. And if one goes far enough to find a looking-off place, the precipices which divide us from the lower world are something terrible to see. There are fir woods in the country . . . where we often went. The tradition uniformly received among the people is that the altopiano of the Setti Comuni was settled by the Cimbri, who took refuge in that almost inaccessible country, after their defeat by the Romans . . . in 104 B.C. Other tribes came after that, but the people usually call themselves Cimbri and a language called Cimbri still exists among them, though beginning to die out. There is one priest who still preaches in it, and some devotional books have been printed in Cimbri, at the printing-office of Asiago.

These Cimbri had a purer faith than their conquerors, and adored one God . . . called in their language I E S V (written in Cimbrian characters I S 8). . . And six families of Asiago prove the purity of their descent by Cimbrian characters on their shields, of whom one, the Benetti, bear the Divine Name itself. (The contadini families have still the habit of eating from dishes marked with the name of our Lord.)

Bassano was the place where Francesca gathered most of the stories in "Hidden Servants." Some of the tales, she says,¹ the one who told them to her learned "at a *fila* or social gathering, held on winter evenings by the contadini, who met in a cattle-shed, where the breath of the cattle warmed the air a little, as they say *Gesù Bambino* was warmed. A lantern hung from a beam overhead, and by its dim light, the women talked and spun."

Here also she gathered a few more of the stories in "Christ's Folk in the Apennines" (for by Apennines she meant, as Ruskin points out, all the hill country of Italy).

1. *H. S.*, p. 70.

EPILOGUE

PEACE

LAST of all, before leaving Florence, I went out from Porta Romana again, on the road to the Certosa, this time to stand by the three quiet graves in Cimitero degli Allori, while the tall cypresses, moved by a little breeze, intoned the great Gregorian chant of Eternity.

As I stood there, thinking of those three who were "sweet and pleasant in their lives and in death were not divided," I comforted myself with Polissena's saying, "God has given us death, but He has given us Heaven, too." Surely of Francesca, as of the Saints in Dante's Paradiso, may we say, "In His Will was her peace."

LA SORELLACCIA
OR
THE WICKED SISTER

Given to Mrs. Shaw in 1877. Photogravure copy given to
Boston Public Library, 1902

LA SORELLACCIA

LEGENDA DELLA MONTAGNA PISTOIESE

As related by the mountain people in the country about Boscolungo

To Mrs. Pauline Agassiz Shaw

In memory of her long continued kindness to the people of Abetone
— from whence this legend of the Sorellaccia was taken.

(Signed: Francesca Alexander,
Firenze, Di. 27, Febbraio, 1877)

The Lord knoweth them that are His

ONCE upon a time, there lived a good frate who had two young sisters. They were good girls, both of them, but very different in character, one from the other. The elder, who was strong and very active, was never happy unless hard at work: it was she who brought the water from the fountain and the wood from the forest, who kept the house and garden in order, and took motherly care of the gentle younger sister. The other, of a contemplative and spiritual nature, seemed to belong quite to another world. She loved to be much alone, with her own thoughts and her books of devotion, and seldom left the house except for the church, where she spent much of her time. When her brother visited them, she was very happy, sitting beside him and listening to his discourses about celestial things, which were perhaps a little above the comprehension of the elder sister, although she, too, loved him dearly, and never grew tired of working for him and waiting on him. It was the great wish of the frate's heart that his sisters should both enter a convent, which seemed to him the surest way to heaven.

Now the frate was a good man, but not altogether, it would appear, a wise one, and he expected from these two girls more obedience than he had, perhaps, a right to expect. The youngest readily yielded to what, after all, was only the echo of her own wishes. But the elder, who had not the least vocation for a monastic life, would not be persuaded. She and the son of one of their neighbors, a poor charcoal-burner, had been attached to each other for several years and were gradually laying by a little money from their earnings toward a very humble wedding outfit. It was certainly an imprudent marriage in their poverty, but their strong affection would listen to no reason. They were married; and on the wedding-day, the frate, whose commands and persuasions had been alike disregarded, told his sister that he would never see her again. So they went their different ways, and the frate heard no more of his married sister, whom he always spoke of bitterly as his "Sorellaccia." The younger sister became a nun of great excellence and piety and he called her his good sister.

In the course of years, the frate, by much prayer and meditation, grew gradually to be humbler, better, and wiser. The white hairs that began to appear among his brown ones made him sober, reminding him how much of his life was left behind him, and how far he was still from being the good Christian that he had meant to be, and thought he should be, when he first entered the Convent. And little by little a certain tenderness crept into his heart towards the poor Sorellaccia. He remembered her pleasant temper and cheerful way of singing at her work, and her warm welcome whenever he went to the house. And then he thought



THE FRATE AT HIS SISTER'S WEDDING

From "La Sorellaccia"

of old days, so far away as to be almost forgotten, when he was a young man, living at home; how much hard work this same Sorellaccia had done for him! How much she had done that was his work, not hers: how she had labored in the harvest and the hay-field, that he might have time for his prayers and his studies: how she had sat up late at night to knit his stockings, and mend his clothes, and how willingly she had done it all, asking nothing in return, not even thanks or any great share of affection, for she had always been pleased that he should love the little sister best! There were other things that he would have liked not to remember, but they kept coming into his mind — her tears and trembling entreaties, when he had parted from her with such unkind words. And after all, he thought, might not her sin be forgiven, if she repented? No doubt she had repented, for her life must have been a hard one, and he would not wish to die, nor to have her die, until peace was made between them!

So at last he told the whole story to the Padre Guardiano, and asked leave to go to his far-away native village and see the Sorellaccia. He would like also to pay a visit to the good sister, whose convent was almost on the road. The Padre Guardiano praised his intention and advised him to take the opportunity to speak to the Sorellaccia about the things of her soul, which, among her worldly cares, were probably much neglected.

The frate thanked the Padre Guardiano and set out on his journey. It was eleven years since he had seen either of his sisters, but he had written often to his good sister, and her beautiful, pious letters had been a great comfort to him. It was a great way to her convent and he was obliged to make the whole journey on

foot, stopping to rest under a tree sometimes, or in the houses of the contadini. These were kind to him and would often put a piece of bread or an egg or an apple in the bag that he carried on his back, that he might not go back to his own convent empty-handed.

At last he reached the place so often in his mind, where his good sister had led her saintly life, now for many years. The old porteress, who was deaf and suspicious, kept him waiting a long time in the corridor, while she went back and forth, with messages from him to the Madre Badessa, and from the Madre Badessa to him. But a letter from the Padre Guardiano at length procured him admittance. He remembered that he had it with him and sent it in to the Madre Badessa, and she sent word that he should come in. So he followed the old porteress through the corridor, and across a pretty retired little garden, surrounded by a cloister and with a little fountain in the middle, tinkling away in the sunshine and silence, and then through two or three cold empty rooms, into one very plainly furnished, with a wooden bench along the wall, a picture of the Madonna above, with a lamp burning before it, and opposite to the door, a window with an iron grating and a curtain hanging behind it. As the frate stood looking at the grated window, his heart beat very fast. It was so long since he had seen this dear little sister! He tried to think how she would look, grown a little thinner and older, and he called up hastily a picture of her with her eyes not quite so bright and the lines beginning to deepen in her pretty, modest face; this he did with a sort of unconscious fear lest the first sight of her should be a shock to him.

But the picture which he called up to his mind was not in the least like what appeared when the curtain was drawn aside from behind the iron bars. A beautiful saintly face, surrounded by bands of white linen, large luminous eyes, a skin transparent as an opal, and with something such an indefinite changeable color in the cheeks, a pale mouth with a sweet, faint, absent smile about it. This was not his little sister grown older, but (as it seemed to him) a glorified saint, with something of his little sister's features.

"Rosina?" he said doubtfully.

"There is no more Rosina," said a soft, resigned, faraway-sounding voice behind the bars. "She died long ago. There is only Sister Leonarda now." Then, seeing his great emotion, "I am glad that you have come, Padre Girolamo. I have prayed much that I might see you once again."

The poor frate could hardly speak. "I too have prayed for this consolation," he said. "But I can stay only a little. Tell me something of the life you lead."

"I live," said the good sister, "as one may who is dead to the world."

The frate looked at her reverently.

"But it was kind of you to come so far to see me," said she.

"Or perhaps you are on a journey?"

"I am," he answered, "going to see the poor Sorellaccia. As we grow older, we see things differently. I am afraid I have been too hard and unforgiving towards her and now I am going to see her."

"To forgive her? Thank the Lord!" said the good sister.

"To forgive and to be forgiven," said the frate.

"Give her my love," said the good sister, "Poor woman, how much happier and safer she might have been if she had taken your advice! I owe it all to you, Padre, that I am in this place of safety! You were my spiritual Father."

"The Lord be praised!" said the frate, "Your words are a great comfort to me."

"I have heard," said the good sister, "that the Sorellaccia is very poor, and I know that she had six children four years ago. I have not heard from her since."

"Poor unfortunate!" said the frate with a deep sigh of compassion. "Truly she has her punishment in this world!"

"Let us hope," said the good sister, "that so much trouble may be to the salvation of her soul."

"I fear," said the frate sadly, "that it is a sort of trouble which is more likely to drag her down and keep her mind to earthly things. I hope you pray for her, Rosina — Sister Leonarda, I mean. If anything can save her, they will be your prayers, for I think you live very near heaven. But tell me now about yourself, how you pass your time, how life passes with you."

"Mostly in the observance of the rules of our order," she answered, "I spend many hours a day on my knees, and fast twice in the week, and sleep little and rise at midnight for prayers — but we all do the same."

"But you have other devotional exercises and penances which you hide even from the eyes of your sisters, is it not so?"

The good sister blushed a little and said, "The Lord knows."

"I see," said the frate. "Oh, my dear blessed sister! What a

treasure you are laying up in heaven! Take courage and keep on to the end and what a glorious place you will have there! And pray for me, your poor unworthy brother, that I may be near enough to see you, though no doubt I shall be much lower down! But your merits may even save the Sorellaccia!"

"We must not despair of her," said the good sister, "God's mercy is very great."

"Yes, very," said the frate, but he sighed as he spoke. After a little other discourse, as the frate was about going, he said, "I have brought you a little present, Sister dear, such a one as a poor frate can give, just to show my good will"; and he gave her a rosary.

She took it through the bars devoutly and pressed to her lips the medal attached.

"You will say it for me sometimes, will you not?" said the frate.

"Yes, every day," said the good sister, "I have little else to do and I usually spend the day saying the rosary over and over, all alone in my cell."

"You will have your reward some day," said her brother, "and do say it, now and then, for that poor unfortunate Sorellaccia!"

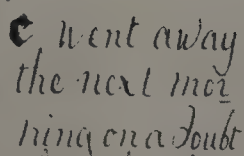
"I will do so indeed," said the good sister.

And after that, they fell to talking about spiritual matters, as had always been their habit when they were together, and before long, the frate was obliged to go. There were tears in his eyes as he took leave of his sister of superior sanctity; and he felt a little ashamed of his own emotion. Still it was with a somewhat

sad heart that he toiled up the winding mountain road toward the village where they had all lived together in their youth: he had found a great saint, but it seemed as if he had lost his little sister Rosina.

Arrived at the village, he began to ask his old friends, who soon gathered about him, the way to the Sorellaccia's house. But no one knew where she was. She had left the village some years ago, with her husband, he having been constrained by poverty and a long illness to sell the house and little piece of ground which were all they had. There was one woman who lived in the very house which the Sorellaccia had left, who said that her husband and the Sorellaccia's husband were friends, and had gone off to the Maremma together not many weeks before. She had heard that they were living in a ravine, under a certain high mountain, seven miles away, but she had never been there. It was too late for the frate to go that evening, so he spent the night at the village, and heard all that the neighbors could tell him about the Sorellaccia. He was somewhat surprised to hear with what affectionate regard they spoke of her. Almost every one told him of some kindness received from her in time of trouble or sickness, and all mentioned her patience under her own misfortunes, and her unfailing gentleness with her large family of children.

He went away the next morning on a doubtful search, in the direction where the old woman thought that his sister might be living; and had a long weary scramble up and down the hillsides, stopping now and then at solitary farmhouses, in the hope, often disappointed, of obtaining information. Most of the way there was no road better than a sheep-path. As he walked, he was



search in the direction where the old man thought that his sister might be living. He had a long weary scramble up and down hill-sides, stopping now and then at solitary farm houses in the hope of obtaining information. Most of the way there the road better than a sheep path. As he asked him as thinking what he should say he scellaccia. He was something of approach and actually, once or twice, he found him reciting to the rocks and trees the address which he was preparing for that poor woman. "He would say in a solemn voice, 'I come to ask that we may be friends once in. I have done wrong toward you. I have a proud and hard; but let the past be forgotten between us. Whatever your sins may have been, you have paid for them bitterly; there is no hope, the sufferings of this life, if rightly borne, may atone for much, and you have prayers of our angel in the cement. Let us both forgive, as we hope to be forgiven!'"

Il giorno dopo si metterà di nuovo in viaggio, facendo con gran fatica le sue ricerche secondo le Direzioni poco chiare della Vecchia Donna. Si acca a un cammino lunare ed affannoso, su e giù per le montagne, fermandosi di quando in quando a qualche casa solitaria, colla Idea speranza d'ottenere delle informazioni. Per la più parte della via non c'era strada e seguiva alla macchia le tracce lasciate da branchi di pecore, che alle volte si era intravisti quelle solitudini. Mentre camminava stava studiando intorno a quello che doveva fare alla sua discesa. "Borrella!" diss'egli, stendendo la mano e recitando in tuono solenne di predicatore, le parole che preparava per quando ve-
"rera Donna. "Fisacciamola pace!". "Non ho peccato contro a te, non t'era agli mortificati tra noi tutti ti assenti. E tu sofferenze presenti potiam ne fare e ci pensare la tua mancanza. E c'è un'angel tuo angelo nel contento che prega per te. Per doniamoci e predichiamo a' ricchi ci peruloni!"

thinking what he should say to the Sorellaccia. He was something of a preacher and actually, once or twice, he found himself reciting to the rocks and trees the address he was preparing for that poor woman. "Sister," he would say, in a solemn voice, "I have come to ask that we may be friends once again. I have done wrong towards you, I have been proud and hard; but let the past be forgotten between us. Whatever your sins may have been, you have paid for them bitterly. There is still hope. The sufferings of this life, if rightly borne, may atone for much, and you have the prayers of our angel in the convent. Let us both forgive as we hope to be forgiven."

Late in the day, at the bottom of an almost inaccessible ravine, he came on a little stone cottage, with one or two cherry trees beside it. It seemed to him as poor and forlorn a dwelling as he had ever seen — not another roof in sight. It might have been swept away in the spring by the torrent that ran so near the door, and perhaps weeks would have passed before the house or its inmates would have been missed. A number of little children, ragged and barefoot, were playing noisily under the cherry trees. When they saw the frate, they stopped short for a minute, staring at him with astonished eyes, and then ran off to the house, crying, "Mamma, Mamma! Here comes a frate!"

At this, a woman appeared at the door, a woman worn with labor, and brown with exposure to all weathers, dressed in clothes that had seen almost as rough usage as herself, but with a kind and happy face. He had just time to see that it was the Sorellaccia when, with an exclamation of joy, she ran forward and embraced him.

"O my dear brother," said the Sorellaccia, "I thought you would come." And then she could say no more, for the tears came in a great stream, and she stood trying to wipe them away, that she might the better see her brother's face. "It is too much, too much," she said, "But I knew you would come some day. I knew you were not really so cruel as you said you were. Come in, come in. I can hardly understand it yet, that you are really my dear brother, with me once again."

By this time the frate had forgotten all about his discourse, and stood holding her rough hand in his and saying nothing but, "Poor Sonina, dear Sonina!"

In a few minutes he found himself in the house, sitting on the wooden bench at the table, and the Sorellaccia, laughing and crying by turns, was at the fire, making some cakes for him of chestnut flour. "There," she said, as she brought them to him in a clean, coarse cloth, "I remember when you used to like my cakes. As soon as you have eaten, we will talk, but you must be hungry and tired too, and you look pale. Now, children, if you want to make such a noise, do run out, for your poor uncle is tired out and wants to rest. And when you are rested, I want to show you all my babies." With this, she sat down on the bench at his side and looked in his face anxiously. "I wonder if they take good care of you in the convent?" she said, "You look just as if you wanted me to take care of you as I used to."

"Poor Sonina," said the frate, "I did not think you would have met me like this. I was not good to you once, poor girl."

But she put her finger to his lip to stop him. "Never mind anything, so long as you have come back to me! No doubt I

troubled you enough when I was young, but I never could be good like Rosina."

The name of the good sister recalled the frate to a sense of his duty. "And now, Sister," said the frate, pushing away the remains of the chestnut cakes, and putting on the sober and authoritative expression he generally wore in the pulpit, "I have come a long way to see you, and have your welfare much at heart. I want you to tell me what sort of life you are leading."

"O dear brother," she said, "I have nine little children, and my husband is in the Maremma, and we are very poor. You can imagine what my life is. Up before daybreak, to drive our little cow to pasture, and then home to lay the fire and wash and dress the babies. And then I must find something to feed them all. And believe me, I do not always know, the day beforehand, where it is to come from. But the Lord is good, and He has always sent us a handful of meal, or a few potatoes before we needed them. There is a neighbor, two miles off, who has been very kind to me. Then, for the rest, I have to go for wood to make up our woodpile for the winter, and I work in our little garden, where we raise a few vegetables. Then I must wash all the clothes at the torrent down there, and I must mend all the poor little rags as well as I can, and somehow or other, I always have more than I can do. And in the evening, when the babies are all in bed, I sit up and spin. My kind neighbor lets me spin for her. She is rich, they say; she has more than one hundred sheep, and she pays me in wool, so that I can knit some stockings for my poor man away in the Maremma. Ever since he had the fever, I have to take more care of him because —"

“Stop!” said the frate, interrupting her and holding up his hand, “These are all trifles which will count for little at the Day of Judgment. It is of your soul that I would hear.”

The Sorellaccia sat silent and looked rather bewildered.

“How often do you go to church?” he asked her, somewhat severely.

She dropped her eyes and answered hesitatingly, “How can I go there? The church is seven miles away and I have no one to help me take care of the children.”

“I understand,” he said. “You never go to church! Or perhaps you go when your husband is at home?”

“Men are not like us,” said the Sorellaccia, blushing, “and my husband — he is an angel, but he has much to trouble him: he has not patience with the children.”

“My poor sister,” said the frate, speaking this time in a tone of compassion, “what good will all these frivolous excuses do you at the last day? I am grieved, truly grieved, to find you wholly occupied with the trifles of this world. And when you have lost your soul, where will the knitting and the spinning and the babies be then?”

The Sorellaccia took courage and looked steadfastly in his face. “God gave me the children,” she said, “I cannot think He will lose my soul because I took care of them.”

The frate shook his head. “The Lord’s service before all,” he said.

Now the poor woman had an indefinite idea that she was serving the Lord in working for the children, but she could not quite put it into words, so she said nothing.

"Beware," he continued, "that you be not like those who have laid up treasure for themselves on earth and have been afterwards less rich towards God."

"Indeed, indeed, I lay up no treasures," said the Sorellaccia, "we have lost almost all we used to have."

Just then, they were interrupted by a little cry from the cradle in the corner, and she started up and ran to take her baby. "See how pretty he is," she said, as she sat by her brother's side with the little one in her arms.

But the frate looked troubled. "Poor thing," he said, "truly you have had much trouble in this world."

"The worst was last year," said the Sorellaccia, "I had twins, a boy and a girl —"

"Awful!" said the frate.

"And they were eighteen months old and so pretty! The little girl was named Rosina. She was so like our dear sister Rosina — and she died! and that was the greatest sorrow that ever I had."

Now all this was as much beyond the frate's comprehension as his discourse had been beyond hers, so he made no answer. But as he saw her bending over her baby, with a face full of pleasure, and the other children clustering around her, his heart sank. "What can I do" he thought, "for this poor worldly woman? I hope at least," he said, after a while, "that you are particular about your devotional exercises in the house? I hope you recite the rosary every day?"

"How can I?" she said, "I never have any time."

"Sister, sister," he said, "you will never go to heaven this way! See, I have brought you a rosary for a present." But as he gave it to her, the baby caught it in his little hands.

"O, he will break it," said the Sorellaccia, and with some difficulty, she took it away from him, and hurried it into her apron pocket. "The rosary is beautiful," she said, "Thank you so much for bringing it to me. I shall keep it to remember you by."

"I do not give it to you," he said, "to remember me by, but that you may say it every day for the saving of your soul. Now listen to me. I shall come to see you again next year and you cannot deceive me. I shall know whether you have said the rosary or not. I cannot bear to see you lost, without doing something to help you. But I have said enough." And after that, he fell to talking about the good sister, in the hope that so bright an example might do some good; but it had little effect, and he went away at last sad and discouraged.

A year passed, and once again the frate found himself walking along the pretty, chestnut-shaded road on his way to visit his sisters. Of course he went to see the good sister first. He found her very little changed, more lovely than ever, if anything, "How has life gone with you?" he said.

"As the Lord has pleased," she answered. She never had much to say about the things of this world.

"Will you show me the rosary," he said, "that I gave you last year?" and she passed it immediately through the bars into his hands; and she had used it so much during the year that the beads had lost their shape and were worn half away.

At this sight, the frate was overcome with tenderness and reverence. "Dear sister," he said, "what treasure you are laying up in heaven! What glory you are preparing for yourself! Oh, if

I can only have a place near you! Strange that I should have one sister so good and another — Oh, if you knew how I found the Sorellaccia!”

“Why, what is the matter with her?” said the good sister.

“Alas!” said the frate, “I found her wholly immersed in worldly cares, utterly indifferent to the things of the soul. Will you believe it? She leads the life rather of a beast than a Christian. She never goes to church, never says a prayer” — This last assertion was gratuitous on his part, but he had taken it for granted when he heard she had no time for the rosary. “There is no fear of God in her heart. She is leading a life that can end in nothing but the loss of her soul.”

“O Padre Girolamo, how dreadful!” said the good sister, growing pale. “But she was not so bad as that when I knew her.”

“One never stands still in this world,” said the frate; “one must grow better or worse, and she has taken the wrong road, poor woman! And the worst of it is,” he continued, “that it seems impossible to alarm her about herself. She is ready with every sort of excuse, in particular her children, of whom she evidently makes idols.”

The eyes of the good sister filled with tears. “And I have prayed so much for her,” she said; “I have always heard that children are a great snare for the soul.”

“It is rather the inordinate affection of some mothers,” said the frate, “which stands in the way of their salvation, and our own mother was one of those who seek first the Kingdom of Heaven. I remember very well how she always went to Mass, rain or shine, the first thing every morning, and Sonina, when

she was a little girl, instead of accompanying her, used to prefer to stay at home and light the fire and sweep the floor and make a cup of coffee for father's breakfast before he went to his work. I fear that our father, poor man, through a disordinate care for the commodities of this life, encouraged her in her love for these trivial pursuits, which have been so great a snare to her soul. But I am going to see her again, and you may be sure that I shall try what can be done."

"I should like to send her a medal," said the good sister, "one of St. Joseph, that I have worn myself for a long time."

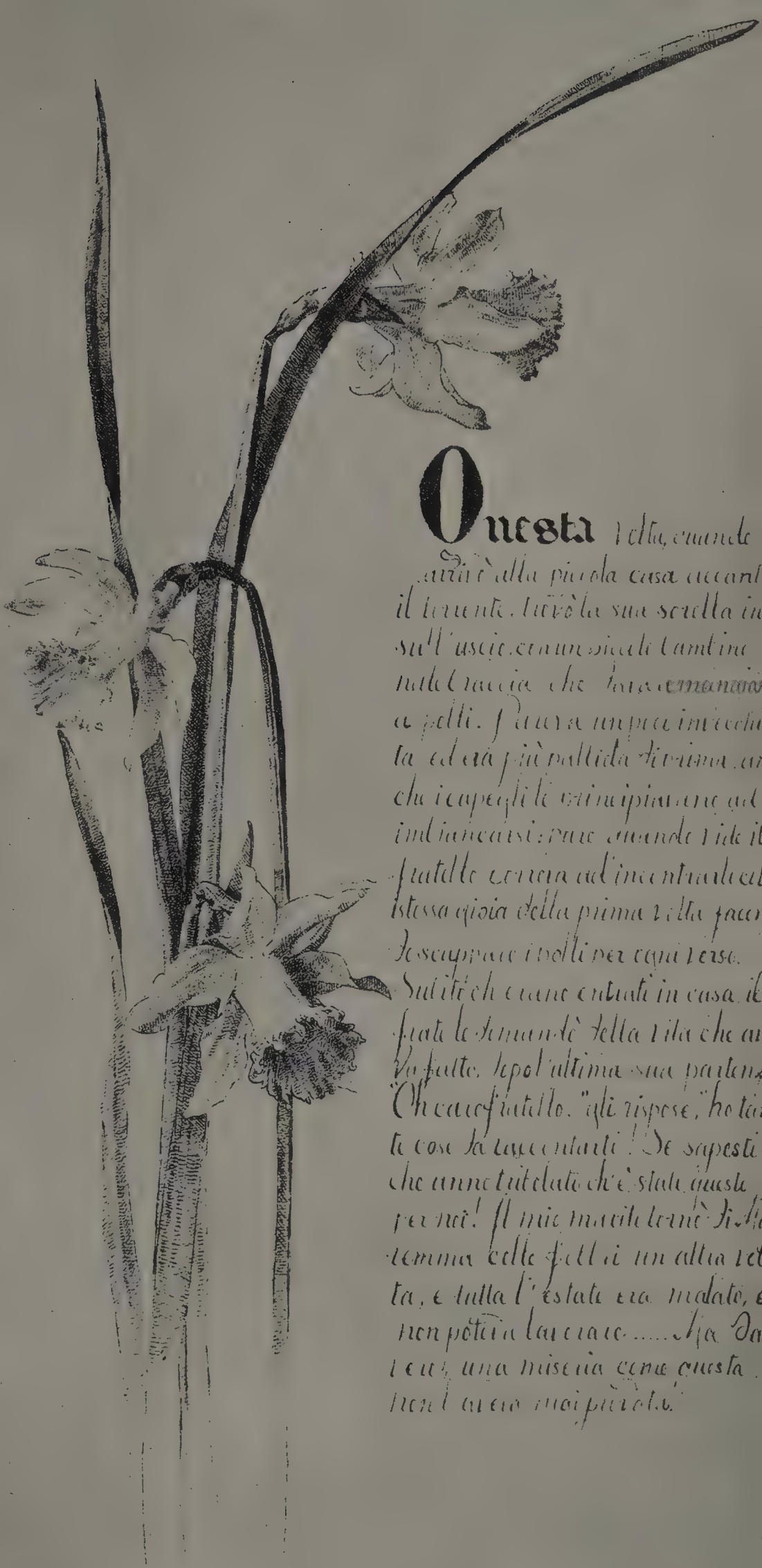
"Yes, let me have it for her," said the frate, "we must leave nothing untried. But believe me, Sister Leonarda, I have a great weight on my heart for that poor woman. But I would not distress you with my discourse. Let us rather talk of something else." And they said no more about the Sorellaccia.

This time, when the frate arrived at the little house in the ravine, his sister was standing at the door, with a baby in her arms, feeding some chickens. She looked older and paler and her hair was turning a little gray, but she ran forward to meet him as joyously as ever, causing the chickens to flutter away in all directions. As soon as they had sat down in the house, and the first salutations were over, he asked her how life had passed with her since they had parted.

"O dear brother," she answered, "I have many things to tell you. This has been a troubled year for us. My poor husband came home from the Maremma last spring with the fever again and he was ill all summer and not able to work. We have never been quite so poor before. And in the midst of all our troubles, just



Whis time,
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 her arms, feeling some-
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 been quite so poor before."



Onesta volta, quando
 arrivò alla piccola casa accanto
 al torrente, trovò la sua sorella in
 sull'uscio, con un sicco lambino
 nella faccia che aveva emanato
 a pelli. S'aura un po' invecchi-
 ta ed era più pallida di prima, an-
 che i capelli le cominciavano ad
 indianarsi: ma quando vide il
 fratello corse ad incontrarlo con
 la stessa gioia della prima volta, facen-
 do scappare i polli per ogni verso.
 Subito che erano entrati in casa, il
 fratello le domandò della vita che an-
 davo fatto. Dopo l'ultima sua paroluz-
 za. "Oh caro fratello!" gli rispose, "ho tan-
 te cose da raccontarti! De saperti
 che unno tutelato che è stato questo
 per noi! Il mio marito tornò di Cri-
 mezza colle febbri e un'alta feb-
 bre, e tutta l'estate era malato, e
 non poteva lavorare. Ma da
 quel che una miseria come questa
 non l'avevo mai più visto."

when things were at the worst, this last little baby came. And the other, that you saw last year, he has been so ill with cutting his teeth, poor little dear! Then the doctor ordered meat and wine and various medicines for my husband and we had no money. I sold my earrings that were my poor mother's. They were all I had left, for the necklace went when my husband had the fever before. But the money was all spent in a few days and we had to sell the cow. I have shed many tears since I saw you. Sometimes, we almost despaired. I could only ask the Lord to help us; but He did help us and my husband lived. God never fails, is it not true, Padre Girolamo?"

"He never fails those who serve Him rightly," said the frate, "And His patience is great even towards sinners."

"Then our neighbor whom I told you about — she who has so many sheep, has taken our Teresina to pasture them. The child is away all day and only comes back to us in the evening. She is a good little thing and does it very willingly, that there may be one mouth less to feed at home, and so much more for the little ones."

"Yes, I understand," said the frate, rather indifferently, "but I wish more particularly to hear about your soul's welfare. By the way, let me see that rosary."

"What rosary?" asked the Sorellaccia.

"That one I gave you last year."

"O, I begin to remember. Let me see. What did I do with that rosary?"

"You put it in the chest," said a little boy.

"So I did, because you and Cecchino quarrelled about it and

I was afraid you might break it. But how did you ever remember it?"

"Because I tried to open the chest to take it out and the lid fell and pinched my fingers," said Pietrino.

The Sorellaccia was already turning over the little stock of worn and mended linen in her chest, and pretty soon she drew out the rosary and came and put it in her brother's hand.

He had been questioning Pietrino. "Did you look for the rosary that you might say your prayers to the Madonna, my little dear?"

"No," said the child, "I only wanted it to play with."

The frate sighed. Then he looked at it attentively. It was quite new and bright and showed no sign of having been used. He held it in his hand for a few minutes without speaking or moving. His face grew flushed and dark, and when the Sorellaccia spoke to him, once or twice, he made her no answer. At last he spoke, slowly and in a low voice. "I should not wonder," he said, "if that rosary should be brought forward against you at the Day of Judgment."

The Sorellaccia, terrified by his look and words, began to weep and the children all looked much alarmed and began to crowd around her. The frate, after another short interval of silence, rose and began to walk up and down the room in an agitated manner. The Sorellaccia, thinking that she had offended him, begged him to have patience and to excuse her.

At first he made no answer, but at last he came and sat down by his sister again. "Sonina," he said, "this has been going on too long. You may believe me or not, as you will, but I tell you

the truth. You can never go to Heaven this way! Now I cannot leave you in this state. To-morrow is Sunday and you must go to church. Hush! Let me speak! I am resolved that you shall have no excuse. To-morrow I shall come and stay with the children, while you go to church."

"You are very kind," said the Sorellaccia, hesitatingly, "I should like to go, but —"

"Hush!" said her brother, raising his hand, "No excuses! We have had too many of them already."

"But I am afraid my children will trouble you, they are rather wild —"

"I will keep them in order! Remember, I shall be here early to-morrow morning."

When she saw that he was resolved, she was only too well pleased at the prospect of a holiday and thanked him warmly for his kindness. The next morning, when he came, she had already been about for several hours. The children were all washed and combed and dressed in the best they had — though even the best was poor enough! She had brought in a good provision of wood for the fire and had filled the tall copper pitchers with water. On the table were some slices of polenta, to give to the children in case they should be hungry, and a little porridge which she had made for the baby. She herself wore her black dress, with the embroidered veil, handkerchief, and apron in which she was married. "I will come back as soon as I can," said the Sorellaccia.

"No, indeed," said the frate, "you must stay for Vespers. It is so long since you have been to church — Indeed, I am sorry

to see you so anxious to cut down your religious exercises to the least possible. Come, you had better be going: it is a long walk. Give me the baby." And he took the little stiff bundle out of her arms. As he did so, it occurred to him that this was the first time, since he was a boy, that he had ever held a baby in his arms. Also that he had never supposed that babies were so heavy!

"I'm afraid they will trouble you," said the Sorellaccia.

"No fear of that," said the frate.

And the poor woman, after charging the children to be good, went alone on her way to church.

After the Sorellaccia was gone, the frate sat still, feeling rather strange with the baby on his knees, trying to look, however, as dignified as possible, so as to awe the children into good behavior. These, for a few minutes, stood about him pretty quietly, the younger ones half frightened at being left with a stranger, the older ones watching him with much curiosity. In a little while, however, they all began to take confidence. One or two of the elder boys went to feeling in the large linen bag, and helping themselves to some of the chestnuts and apples which had been given to him on the way. They were used to eating anything which they could find about the house, and did not stop to think that these did not belong to them. I think, if the frate had reminded them of this in a gentle voice, they would have stopped, but when he shouted, "Be still, there, or I'll come and give you a slap," they appeared to receive it as a declaration of war.

One of the children answered, "You had better try," and prepared himself for a run: at which the poor frate looked and felt

very helpless and all the children laughed. However, he had no time to scold, for the baby, frightened by his rough voice, had begun to cry. To keep it quiet, he tried feeding it, but with indifferent success, for (besides spilling a great deal over its clothes) he turned the porridge down its throat so fast that he choked it, and made it scream worse than ever. Then one little girl called him "ugly, wicked frate, to hurt the dear little baby!" He felt rather foolish and very cross, and I suppose that was why, when he saw little Pietrino tying knots in the rosary which he wore at his side, he really did give him a slap, or rather, aimed it at him, for Pietrino dodged under the table, losing his balance, as he did so, and catching at the rosary to save himself, breaking the string, and letting the beads roll on the floor.

But the frate did not notice this, for the hand which he had aimed at Pietrino had come down on the sharp edge of the table with such force as to bring the tears into his eyes, and for a minute or two he thought of nothing else. But he was soon aroused by seeing two of the boys fighting, rolling on the floor and pulling each other's hair. They had found a beautiful red apple in the frate's bag and they were quarrelling for it. He called to them to stop, but they took no notice. Then he thought that one of them would hurt the other, and he jumped from his seat to separate them. But the baby, that was the youngest but one, had been sitting on the floor for some time playing with his rope girdle, twisting it in and out about the leg of his chair. And so, when he rose, the chair came up with him, causing him to stumble: and in his confusion the poor little baby, sad to say, slipped from his arms and fell on the floor!

The poor frate! His first thought was that he had killed the baby, but its shrill screams soon reassured him on that point. He picked it up timidly, while a little girl disengaged him from the chair, and all the children united in abusing him and in pitying and caressing the little one, which for a long time was not to be quieted. The frate, to soothe it, began to walk up and down the room with it. Then it was still, but every time the poor man tried to sit down, it began to scream again. He felt as if he should be crazed and wondered how his sister had lived so long. After about two hours, his little tyrant went to sleep, and he, utterly exhausted, sat down to rest. His head ached so that he could hardly hold it up, and his shoulders ached more than his head. He was on the point of dropping asleep himself when a very little girl came up and asked him for a drink of water.

"Take some out of the pitcher," said he; and the little girl climbed up on the bench, to reach the pitcher, which stood on the table. But she was very small, and the pitcher was very large, and in trying to bring it to her lips, she upset it and all the water poured over her.

Crying and dripping, she came and stood before the frate. "I am all wet," she said.

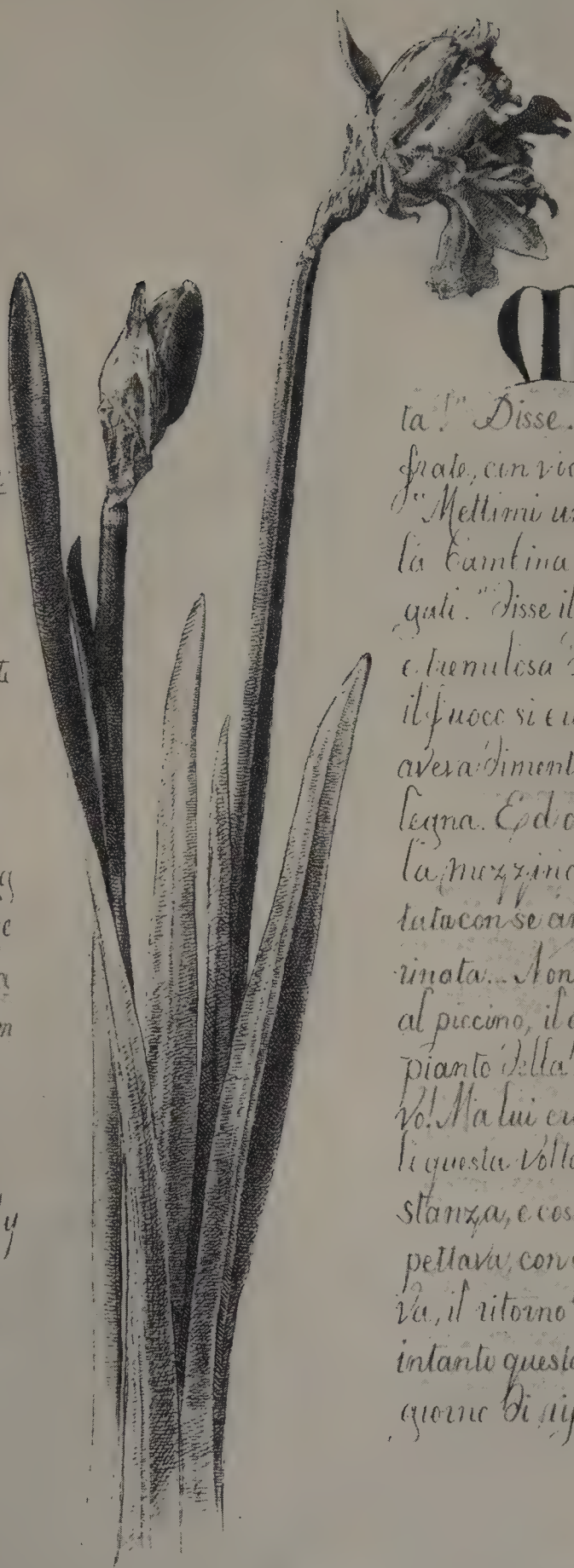
"So I see," said the frate, helplessly.

"I want you to put me on some dry clothes," said the child.

"You had better go to the fire and dry yourself," he answered, in a voice that was quite tremulous and husky from fatigue. But the fire was all out, he had forgotten to put any wood on it. And now he saw that the pitcher, in falling, had knocked over the cup of porridge. He had nothing now to give the baby to eat!



Am all
wet! She
id. So I see: said the frate, hope-
sly. I want you to put me on some
clothes; said the child. You had
to go to the fire and dry yourself:
answered, in a voice that was quite
shaky and tremulous with fatigue.
But the fire was all out, he had for-
gotten to put any wood on it. And
when he saw that the pitcher in falling
had knocked over the cup of penic-
he had nothing new to give the ba-
bly to eat. And the baby was scream-
ing again, the nurse had awakened.
But he was too tired to wait
out with it any more, so he let
scream, and waited resignedly
as he could, for his sister's return.
Meanwhile the scullaccia was
passing a most delightful day
of rest.



Mi son tutta tagna-
ta!" Disse. "Ho visto!" Rispose il
frate, con voce stanca e rassegnata.
"Mettimi un vestito asciutto!" Disse
la bambina. "Vai al fuoco, e asciu-
gati." Disse il frate, colla voce fioca
e tremolosa dalla stanchezza. Ma
il fuoco si era tutto spento: il frate
aveva dimenticato di metterci delle
legna. Ed ora egli s'accorgeva che
la mezzina nel cascare aveva por-
tato con se anche la tazza della fa-
rinata. Non aveva più nulla per dare
al piccino, il quale si era svegliato al
pianto della sorella, e urlava di mo-
ro! Ma lui era troppo stanco per poter
in questa volta portarsi intorno alla
stanza, e così lo lasciava urlare, e as-
pettarla con quanta pazienza pote-
va, il ritorno della sua sorella. Ed
intanto questa stava a godere un bel
giorno di riposo.

And the baby was screaming again, the noise had awakened it. But he was too tired to walk about with it any more, so he let it scream, and waited, as resignedly as he could, for his sister's return.

Meantime, the Sorellaccia was passing a most delightful day of rest. As soon as she reached the little green in front of the church, in her native village, her old friends began to gather about her, to welcome her back among them, to ask and to tell news of her life and of theirs, to embrace her and press her hand, and hold up their little children to kiss her. Then, with a thankful heart, she went into church: and no one can tell how happy she felt at being there once again; and after that, all the time until Vespers, she was petted, feasted, and made much of, in the houses of her various friends. Late in the day, as she walked quickly along the solitary road toward her own house, she felt rested and refreshed as she had not felt for a long time. Her pockets were full and she carried a basket besides; for almost every family in the village, knowing her great poverty, had made her some little present — a few potatoes or a ball of butter or a dozen apples — so that she need not be anxious about a meal for her children, for some days at least.

But when she entered the door, she saw a sad sight. The little baby lay on the frate's knees screaming and with its face quite purple, and the larger baby sat on the floor, screaming also. The little girl who had tipped over the pitcher sat wet and shivering, with blue lips. The two elder boys had gone to fighting again, and had torn each other's clothes, and the others were mostly engaged in some sort of mischief. The fire was out and the water

and porridge were spilt on the floor, among the remains of the frate's rosary.

As for the frate, poor man! he sat utterly bewildered, with both hands raised, until he saw his sister, when he rose and came to meet her. "There! take your baby," he said; "you need not go to church any more! If you can keep your patience with these children, you will go to Heaven before I shall." And before the astonished Sorellaccia could answer, he was gone, hurrying away out of sight and never once looking behind him.

The frate never saw either of his sisters again in this world. A few months after his most unhappy day with the children, he was sent to a convent in a distant part of the country and there he stayed till he died. He went to Heaven, for he had been a good frate, and when there, he never forgot to pray for his two sisters, but especially for the Sorellaccia. And they both lived to be old women. The good sister, in her old age, came to be regarded as a saint, and people used to come from all the country around to ask for her blessing and her prayers. And the Sorellaccia led a hard, poor life, but she was always patient. And her children all grew up to be good men and women, through the influence of her patience and good example.

One day, after the frate had been for sometime in Heaven, he heard himself called by S. Peter. "Run, frate, run," said the Saint, "for there is a saint coming!" The frate hurried toward the door, when S. Peter called after him again, "Open both the doors, open them as wide as you can. This is a great saint, and we must give her an honorable reception!" So he threw both the

beautiful pearl doors wide back: and there on the step, very humble and doubtful of her own admittance, stood the poor Sorellaccia.

“O my poor dear sister,” said the frate, and taking both her hands, he drew her hastily in. “The Lord be praised! Tell me how you came. Were they our good sister’s prayers that saved you? But look up! This is Heaven. You have nothing more to fear!” For the poor woman, overcome at first and dazzled by the glory, had dropped on her knees.

It was some time before she could speak at all, and when her voice did come, at first it was only in broken words of wonder and thanksgiving. But at last she spoke to her brother: “Did you know I was there?” she said; “because, I had been standing for some time on the doorstep, and I was afraid to knock, for fear they would say ‘This is no place for you.’ It was a great mercy that you came to the door: how did it happen that you came just then?”

The frate, who, in his joy at seeing the poor Sorellaccia in Heaven, had forgotten everything else, now tried to collect his thoughts. All at once, he pressed his hand against his forehead with a look of much mortification. “Oh, what have I done?” he said, “and what will S. Peter say? You must know that S. Peter sent me to open the door, because there was a great saint coming: he said particularly that I was to give her an honorable reception — and then I saw you on the doorstep and I was so rejoiced that I forgot all about the saint and I suppose she came in without any reception at all!”

"But I saw no one while I waited at the door," said the Sorellaccia. "However, you had better go and tell S. Peter how it happened and I am sure he will have patience."

So the frate, leaving his sister with some of the angels, who had come up to speak to her, went back, all confused, to S. Peter. "O S. Peter," he said, "what can I say? I went to open the door for the saint, as you said, and there on the doorstep I found a poor sister of mine — a sister who had cost me many tears! For she was not a very good woman, that is, not very religious, and I had been often doubtful whether I should see her here. And I was so rejoiced to meet her again and to know that she was safe that I forgot all about the saint and I am afraid she came in without a word of welcome from anyone! I am very sorry, I know it was wrong in me, but I hope —"

Here S. Peter interrupted him. "You need not be troubled. Your sister is the saint whom I sent you to meet."

The frate looked quite puzzled for a moment. Then he said, "But this was not the good sister! I have, I know, one sister who is a saint, but this was the other."

"Yes," said S. Peter, smiling, "I know who she is: the sister who had ten children, and who worked so hard for them, and never once lost patience."

Here the frate blushed a little, and S. Peter continued: "Her cross was a heavy one, but she never complained, though she suffered cold and hunger and weariness and anxiety, and — sometimes — unkind treatment from those she loved. In her humility she took all as from the Lord's hands, and her faith never failed, even when things looked the darkest. And by her

patient goodness she won over all those wild, tough children of hers. They and her husband are all on the way to follow her here."

"Is it possible?" said the frate. "And only to think that I used to call her the Sorellaccia!" So he went back to his sister and told her what S. Peter had said.

Not many days after the Sorellaccia had entered Paradise, S. Peter called the frate again. "Run and open the door," he said, "there is another saint coming."

"Must I open both the doors wide this time?" said the frate.

"No," said S. Peter, "it will be enough to open one of the doors just a little. This is not such a great saint as the other."

So the frate went to the door and opened it just a crack and there was his good sister! At first he was so overjoyed to see her that he did not think about what S. Peter had said; but afterwards it troubled him that she should have been received with less honor than his other sister. So he went back once again to S. Peter. "Why is it," he said, "that you would not let me open the door wide for my good sister, as I did for the other? And why did you say that she was less a saint?"

"Because," said S. Peter, "she led an easy and safe life in her convent, and free from all the troubles which, from beginning to end, beset her sister. She said many rosaries, but then, often she had no other way of occupying her time. It is true, she was most innocent (indeed, she had little temptation to do wrong) and she was of a sweet and pious spirit, and we are glad to have her among us. But she was of little use to others, excepting by her prayers, and often the few words of prayer which her sister used to say,

while she worked for the children, were worth more than many of her rosaries.”

Then the frate went back to his sisters: and he and the good sister wondered, as they looked at the Sorellaccia, to think that they should have so misjudged her. And her glory was greater than theirs, and they were happy it should be so, for people are not envious in Heaven.

And then they thought no more of their past mistakes, for they were all safe and together. And they gave thanks very humbly that their paths, so wide apart on earth, had brought them all to the safe home at last.

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THE SORELLACCIA: Made for Mrs. Quincy Shaw, of Boston, 1877. Now in possession of her daughter, Mrs. Carteret Fenno, of Boston, by whose gracious courtesy Francesca's English translation of the story, and (four) of her illustrations are now reproduced here for the first time. A photogravure copy of the whole book is in the Fine Arts Department of the Boston Public Library.

Present location of the original drawings, so far as known

(From the Library Edition of Ruskin's Works, vol. 32.)

The Ruskin Museum, formerly the St. George Museum, Meersbrook Park, Sheffield, (as listed in its catalogue of 1888 and of 1890).

No. 22: *The Madonna and the Rich Man* (with this note: "In faithful expression of human feeling there has nothing yet, that I know of, been done like this, since the Masters, so called, of art seldom aim at expression at all and those who seek it give momentary states of it, while the expression here is of eternal thought — the amazement, the sorrow, the judgment in the Madonna's eyes are all of Eternity").

No. 23: "Music to the Madonna and the Rich Man," with initial and group of wild flowers.

No. 24: "The Colonel's Leave."

No. 25: "The Jessamine Window" (with this note: "Never before have I seen such penmanship").

Mr. Allen's Collection

Continuation of Old Christmas Hymn.

On St. Anthony.

Rispetto, with girl knitting a sock.

Mrs. Talbot's Collection

"Dio, Ti salvi" — full-page of gipsy saluting the Madonna.

"Hymn to the Cross" — music, English and Italian words, separated by flowers.

Girton College, Cambridge

Four pages of the "Madonna and the Rich Man."

Three Rispetti, English and Italian words with flowers.

Four Rispetti: "O little Things," "O Lad," "O Sun," and "Love, thou didst leave me." (English and Italian words, with flowers).

Two pages of "Old People's Sayings."

Half-page drawing, English and Italian words, music with flowers.

Second page of "I was born when roses were blooming" (with drawing of a Piazza, with English and Italian words).

Newnham College, Cambridge

Second page of "Evening Prayer."

Signora Maria Zanchetta.

The Mother of the Orphans.

The Legend of Santa Marini.

Oxford

Frontispiece to "Roadside Songs" (Beatrice) and to "Tuscan Songs."

Three leaves of "Madonna and the Gipsy" (with pictures, full-page).

Four leaves of "St. Christopher."

Ballad of "La Samaritana" (full-page picture).

The Lovers' "Parting."

Leaf 96 of "Christmas Hymn of Fiumalbo" (with half-page drawing of Christ Child, music, flowers, and English and Italian words).

Portrait of Isabella of Abetone.

Brantwood

Half-title "Tuscan Songs," with almond-blossom.

Author's Preface (with spray of sarsaparilla), two pages.

Old Hymn for Christmas (with olive and narcissus and music).

"Gesù Amor" (picture, music, English and Italian words, and winter aconite).

"Going to Church" (Rispetto).

Most leaves of the "Madonna and the Gipsy." (See Oxford.)

Most of the leaves of "La Samaritana." (See Oxford.)

"On the Ancient Walls of Venice" (old song).

Most of the leaves of "St. Christopher." (See Oxford.)

"Invitation to become a soldier of Christ."

"Shepherd's Serenade" (music, with vignette, leaves and flowers).

"Santa Rosa."

Most leaves of "Life of Santa Zita."

Most leaves of "Christmas Hymn at Fiumalbo." (See Oxford.)

"On the Happiness of Suffering for Jesus."

Rispetti, "How long a time" and "On Monday" (half-page drawing, English and Italian words with flowers).

Rispetti, Plate XCII of "Tuscan Songs" (English and Italian words, flowers and two vignettes).

Rispetti, "I set a lily at my window high" and "A Lighted Candle."

"Letter from Angelo to Rosina" (with portrait, flowers, English and Italian words).

Rispetti, "So lowly born" and "I am not worthy" (with portrait and flowers).

"Christmas Hymn."

Rispetti, "I built a castle" and "When I am dead" (with drawing of Monte Cimone and flowers).

Rispetti, "I want a wife" and "Heard you that music?" (with portrait of a girl and flowers).

Note on Domenico Cerasola.

Mrs. Carteret Fenno, Boston

The Book of the Sorellaccia, eighty pages, all elaborately illustrated.

Mr. Marion Spielman, of London

The Madonnina.

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